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THE
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1916-1918
PART I

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE WORLD CRISIS, 1911-1914

THE WORLD CRISIS, 1915

LIBERALISM AND THE SOCIAL PRO-
BLEM

MY AFRICAN JOURNEY

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL

IAN HAMILTON'S MARCH

LONDON TO LADYSMITH VIA PRE-
TORIA

SAVROLA

THE RIVER WAR

THE STORY OF THE MALAKAND
FIELD FORCE

THE WORLD CRISIS

1916-1918

PART I

BY

THE RT. HON. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL,
C.H., M.P.

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TO
ALL WHO ENDURED

PREFACE

ALL arrangements had been made to publish this third volume of *The World Crisis* two years ago. The material had been assembled, the work studied and planned, and the greater part actually finished, when I was invited to take office in the present Government. The weight of my official duties forced me to put literary projects indefinitely aside, and it is only in these later months that I have been able to finish and correct the final volumes without which the story is incomplete.

In dealing with a field so wide as that of the last three years of the World War, a highly selective process has been necessary. I have tried to find and follow the stepping-stones of Fate. I set myself at each stage to answer the questions 'What happened, and Why?' I seek to guide the reader to those points where the course of events is being decided, whether it be on a battlefield, in a conning-tower, in Council, in Parliament, in a lobby, a laboratory or a workshop. Such a method is no substitute for history, but it may be an aid both to the writing and to the study of history.

I had many and varied opportunities of learning about the war. During the first five months which this volume covers till May, 1916, I commanded a battalion in the line at 'Plugstreet.' Thereafter, until July, 1917, I was occupied in Parliament, and also in defending my conduct as First Lord of the Admiralty before the Statutory Commission of Inquiry into the Dardanelles Expedition. In both these periods I was closely in touch with some of the leading personalities, military and civil, who were conducting British affairs, and also to a lesser extent with those similarly placed in France. I was therefore able though in a private station to follow with attention political and military incidents. In July, 1917, I became Minister of Munitions

in Mr. Lloyd George's administration, and thus for the last seventeen months of the war I was responsible for supplying the Army and Air Force with all their war material. I deem it of interest to record before they fade the impression and emphasis of various episodes, so far as I was personally able to appreciate them.

Nearly ten years have elapsed since the events in this account were ended. Almost all the actors—Admirals, Generals, Prime Ministers, Foreign Secretaries, Chancellors, even Sovereigns and Presidents in the victorious or vanquished states have told their tale, and a gigantic library upon the Great War is already in existence. The official histories of the leading powers march out steadily volume after volume. In England the naval official history has already passed the period of the Battle of Jutland and an additional Admiralty narrative is also available. The official history of the Ministry of Munitions has also been printed. There is therefore no lack of materials to check and amplify personal recollection.

I have been greatly struck in my reading during the last five or six years with the enormous superiority of French war literature and criticism to anything that has appeared in England. Not only is the quantity of authoritative works far greater, but their quality and knowledge is incomparably higher. An immense number of brilliantly written books by responsible persons have enabled the French public to form an instructed view upon the whole inner conduct of the war in its military and political aspects. As far as I can judge, an even greater activity of publication and discussion is taking place in Germany. And here again all the material facts and documents have been disclosed through one channel or another. The time is surely coming when the British public should receive in the form of a series of official publications a full supply of authentic documents in order that a true judgment may be formed of this tremendous epoch. In the meanwhile, I confine myself to printing textually only documents which I have written myself and for which I am personally responsible, or those which have already been published by others here or abroad.

After this volume was far advanced, I read for the first time Defoe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier*. In this delightful work the author hangs the chronicle and discussion of great military and political events upon the thread of the personal experiences of an individual. I was immensely encouraged to find that I had been unconsciously following with halting steps the example of so great a master of narrative. In this present volume I try to present the reader at once with a comprehensive view of the mighty panorama and with a selection of its dominating features ; but I also tell my own story and survey the scene from my own subordinate though responsible station. My own doctrines on the methods of waging war, and the action or advice for which I am accountable, are the target for many criticisms set forth in books by writers of high professional authority. I am glad to be able to unfold my ideas by means of authentic documents written by me during or before the event. I hope that the result will stimulate reflection upon the prodigious cataclysm which has shattered and re-shaped our life and the world we live in.

I desire to express my thanks to those who have assisted me by reading the proofs and advising on technical matters, and I respect their wish for anonymity.

Finally, I make it plain—though it is scarcely necessary—that for all the expressions of opinion and statements of fact which this volume contains, I am alone responsible. They do not profess to represent the official views of the military departments ; and they in no way commit the Government of which I am a member to endorsement or agreement. They constitute a personal judgment and record of events which, though only ten years old, already belong to History.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL.

CHARTWELL MANOR,
January 1, 1927.

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CHAPTER I

THE HIGH COMMAND

Europe Gripped in the Vice—General Michel's Report of 1911—His Dismissal—Joffre Succeeds—His Stability and Impartiality—His Miscalculations—The First Disasters—Galliéni and the Marne—Victory and Reproach—Galliéni and Joffre—Galliéni, Minister of War—France and the Joffre Legend—Sir John French recalled—The new Commander-in-Chief—His Credentials—Decline in Lord Kitchener's Authority—His Just Fame.

THE New Year's light of 1916 rising upon a frantic 1916. and miserable world revealed in its full extent the immense battlefield to which Europe was reduced and on which the noblest nations of Christendom mingled in murderous confusion. It was now certain that the struggle would be prolonged to an annihilating conclusion. The enormous forces on either side were so well matched that the injuries they must suffer and inflict in their struggles were immeasurable. There was no escape. All the combatants in both combinations were gripped in a vice from which no single State could extricate itself.

The northern Provinces of France, invaded and in German occupation, inspired the French people with a commanding impulse to drive the enemy from their soil. The trench lines on which the armies were in deadlock ran—not along the frontiers, where perhaps parley would not have been impossible—but through the heart of France. The appeal to clear the national territory from foreign oppression went home to every cottage and steeled every heart. Germany on the other hand, while her armies stood almost everywhere on conquered territory, could not in the full flush of her strength yield what she had gained with so much blood, nor pay forfeit for her original miscalculations, nor make reparation for the wrong she had done. Any German

Europe
gripped in
the Vice.

Dynasty or Government which had proposed so wise and righteous a course would have been torn to pieces. The French losses and the German conquests of territory thus equally compelled a continuance of the struggle by both nations. A similar incentive operated upon Russia ; and in addition the belief that defeat meant revolution hardened all governing resolves. In Britain obligations of honour to her suffering Allies, and particularly to Belgium, forbade the slightest suggestion of slackening or withdrawal. And behind this decisive claim of honour there welled up from the heart of the island race a fierce suppressed passion and resolve for victory at all costs and at all risks, latent since the downfall of Napoleon.

Not less peremptory were the forces dominating the other parties to the struggle. Italy had newly entered the war upon promises which offered her a dazzling reward. These promises were embodied in the Pact of London. They involved conditions to which Austria-Hungary could never submit without final ruin as a great Power. The acceptance by Britain and France of the Russian claim to Constantinople condemned Turkey to a similar fate. Failure meant therefore to both the Austrian and the Turkish Empires not only defeat but dissolution. As for Bulgaria, she could only expect from the victory of the Allies the dire measure she had meted to Serbia.

Thus in every quarter the stakes were desperate or even mortal ; and each of the vast confederacies was riveted together within itself and each part chained to its respective foe by bonds which only the furnace of war could fuse or blast away. Wealth, science, civilization, patriotism, steam transport and world credit enabled the whole strength of every belligerent to be continually applied to the war. The entire populations fought and laboured, women and men alike, to the utmost of their physical destructiveness. National industry was in every country converted to the production of war material. Tens of millions of soldiers, scores of thousands of cannon hurled death across battle lines, themselves measured in thousands of miles. Havoc on such a scale had never even been dreamed of in the past, and had never proceeded at such a speed in all

human history. To carry this process to the final limit was the dearest effort of every nation, and of nearly all that was best and noblest in every nation.

General
Michel.

But at the same time that Europe had been fastened into this frightful bondage, the art of war had fallen into an almost similar helplessness. No means of procuring a swift decision presented itself to the strategy of the commanders, or existed on the battlefields of the armies. The chains which held the warring nations to their task were not destined to be severed by military genius; no sufficient preponderance of force was at the disposal of either side; no practical method of a decisive offensive had been discovered; and the ill-directed fires of war, leaving the fetters unbroken, preyed through fatal years upon the flesh of the captive nations.

* * * * *

In August, 1914, the name 'Joffre' broke for the first time on British ears. Nothing was known of him then except that he was the proclaimed and accepted Chief of the Armies of France in that hour of her mortal peril which we had determined to share. Seeing that the existence of France was at stake, and trusting in the historic war science of the French Army, the British Government and people gave their confidence frankly and fully to this massive new personage who emerged so suddenly from the recesses of the French War Office and strode forward calmly towards the advancing storm.

Who was he and how did he come to be there at the summit in the supreme hour? What qualities had he shown, what deeds had he done, what forces did he combine or compel, through what chances and trials had he passed, on his road to almost the greatest responsibility in the realm of violent action which ever enveloped one man? To answer such questions it is necessary to retrace the steps of history for some distance.

* * * * *

Early in 1911 General Michel, Vice-President of the Superior Council of War and Commander-in-Chief designate of the French Army in the event of war, drew up a report upon the plan of campaign. He declared that Germany

His Report
of 1911.

would certainly attack France through Belgium ; that her turning movement would not be limited to the southern side of the Belgian Meuse but would extend far beyond it, comprising Brussels and Antwerp in its scope. He affirmed that the German General Staff would use immediately not only their twenty-one active army corps but in addition the greater part of the twenty-one reserve corps which it was known they intended to form on general mobilization. France should therefore be prepared to meet an immense turning movement through Belgium and a hostile army which would comprise *at the outset* the greater part of forty-two army corps. To confront this invasion he proposed that the French should organize and use a large proportion of their own reserves from the very beginning. For this purpose he desired to create a reserve formation at the side of each active formation, and to make both units take the field together under the officer commanding the active unit. By this means the strength of the French Army on mobilization would be raised from 1,300,000 to 2,000,000, and the German invading army would be confronted with at least equal numbers. Many of the French corps would be raised to 70,000 men and most of the regiments would become brigades of six battalions.

These forces General Michel next proceeded to distribute. He proposed to place his greatest mass, nearly 500,000 strong, between Lille and Avesnes to counter the main strength of the German turning movement. He placed a second mass of 300,000 men on the right of the first between Hirson and Rethel ; he assigned 220,000 men for the garrison of Paris, which was also to act as the general reserve. His remaining troops were disposed along the Eastern frontier. Such was the plan in 1911 of the leading soldier of France.

These ideas ran directly counter to the main stream of French military thought. The General Staff did not believe that Germany would make a turning movement through Belgium, certainly not through Northern Belgium. They did not believe that the Germans would use their reserve formations in the opening battles. They did not believe that reserve formations could possibly be made

capable of taking part in the struggle until after a prolonged period of training. They held, on the contrary, that the Germans, using only their active army, would attack with extreme rapidity and must be met and forestalled by a French counter-thrust across the Eastern frontier. For this purpose the French should be organized with as large a proportion of soldiers actually serving and as few reservists as possible, and with this end in view they demanded the institution of the Three Years Service Law which would ensure the presence of at least two complete contingents of young soldiers. The dominant spirits in the French Staff, apart from their Chief, belonged to the Offensive school, of whom the most active apostle was Colonel de Grandmaison, and believed ardently that victory could be compelled from the first moment by a vehement and furious rush upon the foe.

His
Dismissal.

This collision of opinion was fatal to General Michel. It may be that his personality and temperament were not equal to the profound and penetrating justice of his ideas. Such discrepancies have often marred true policies. An overwhelming combination was formed against him by his colleagues on the Council of War. During the tension of Agadir the issue reached a head. The new Minister of War, Colonel Messimy, insisted upon a discussion of the Michel scheme in full Council. The Vice-President found himself alone; almost every other General declared his direct disagreement. In consequence of this he was a few days later informed by the War Minister that he did not possess the confidence of the French Army, and on July 23 he resigned the position of Vice-President of the War Council.

It had been intended by the Government that Michel should be succeeded either by Galliéni or Pau; but Pau made claims to the appointing of General Officers which the Minister would not accept. His nomination was not proceeded with, ostensibly on the score of his age, and this pretext once given was still more valid against Galliéni, who was older. It was in these circumstances that the choice fell upon General Joffre.

Joffre was an engineer officer who, after various employments in Madagascar under Galliéni and in Morocco, had

Joffre
Succeeds.

gained a reputation as a well-balanced, silent, solid man, and who in 1911 occupied a seat on the Superior Council of War. It would have been difficult to find any figure more unlike the British idea of a Frenchman than this bull-headed, broad-shouldered, slow-thinking, phlegmatic, bucolic personage. Nor would it have been easy to find a type which at the first view would have seemed less suited to weave or unravel the profound and gigantic webs of modern war. He was the junior member of the War Council. He had never commanded an army nor directed great manœuvres even in a War Game. In such exercises he had played the part of Inspector-General of the Lines of Communication, and to this post he was at that time assigned on mobilization.

Joffre received the proposal for his tremendous appointment with misgiving and embarrassment which were both natural and creditable. His reluctances were overcome by the assurance that General de Castelnau, who was deeply versed in the plans and theories of the French Staff and in the great operations of war, would be at his special disposal. Joffre therefore assumed power as the nominee of the dominant elements in the French Staff and as the exponent of their doctrines. To this conception he remained constantly loyal, and the immense disasters which France was destined to suffer three years later became from that moment almost inevitable.

General Joffre's qualities however fitted him to render most useful service to the various fleeting French Administrations which preceded the conflict. He represented and embodied 'Stability' in a world of change, and 'Impartiality' in a world of faction. He was a 'good Republican' with a definite political view, without being a political soldier, or one who dealt in intrigue. No one could suspect him of religion, but neither on the other hand could anyone accuse him of favouring Atheist generals at the expense of Catholics. Here at any rate was something for France, with her politicians chattering, fuming and frothing along to Armageddon, to rest her hand upon. For nearly three years and under successive Governments Joffre continued to hold his post, and we are assured that his advice on

technical matters was almost always taken by the various Ministers who flitted across the darkening scene. He served under Caillaux and Messimy; he served under Poincaré and Millerand; he served under Briand and Étienne; he was still serving under Viviani and Messimy again when the explosion came.

His
Stability,
Impartiality,
and Miscal-
culations.

Reference has already been made in the first Volume to the immense miscalculations and almost fatal errors made by General Joffre or in his name in the first great collision of the war. The withering winds of French criticism have pitilessly exposed the deformities of Plan XVII. The Germans, as General Michel had predicted, made their vast turning movement through Belgium. They brought into action almost immediately thirty-four army corps of which thirteen, or their equivalent, were reserve formations. Of the 2,000,000 men who marched to invade France and Belgium 700,000 only were serving conscripts and 1,300,000 were reservists. Against these General Joffre could muster only 1,300,000, of whom also 700,000 were serving conscripts but only 600,000 reservists. 1,200,000 additional French reservists responded immediately to the national call, encumbering the depots, without equipment, without arms, without cadres, without officers. In consequence the Germans outnumbered the French at the outbreak by *three to two* along the whole line of battle, and as they economized their forces on their left, they were able to deliver the turning movement on their right in overwhelming strength. At Charleroi they were *three to one*.

The strategic aspect of General Joffre's policy was not less stultified than the administrative. The easterly and north-easterly attacks into which his four Armies of the Right and Centre were impetuously launched, were immediately stopped and hurled back with a slaughter so frightful that it has never yet been comprehended by the world. His left army, the Fifth, and a group of three Reserve Divisions, sent at the last moment to its aid, together with the British Army, were simultaneously forced back and turned. They only escaped complete envelopment and destruction by the timely retreat which General Lanrezac and Sir John French executed each

independently on his own initiative, and also by the most stubborn resistance and effective rifle fire of the highly trained professional British Infantry. To General Lanrezac, for his complete grasp of the situation and courageous order of retreat, the gratitude of France is due.

It was for the tactical sphere that General Joffre and his school of 'Young Turks,' as they came to be called in France, had reserved their crowning mistakes. The French Infantry marched into battle conspicuous on the landscape in their red breeches and blue coats; their Artillery Officers in black and gold were even more sharply defined targets. The doctrine of the Offensive, raised to the height of a religious frenzy, animated all ranks, and in no rank was restrained by any foreknowledge of the power of magazine rifles and machine guns. A cruel shock lay before them. The Third French Army marching towards Arlon blundered into the Germans in the morning mist of August 22, four or five of its divisions having their heads shorn away while they were still close to their camping grounds. Everywhere along the battle front, whenever Germans were seen, the signal was given to charge. 'Vive la France!' 'À la baïonnette,' 'En Avant'—and the brave troops, nobly led by their regimental officers, who sacrificed themselves in even greater proportion, responded in all the magnificent fighting fury for which the French nation has been traditionally renowned. Sometimes these hopeless onslaughts were delivered to the strains of the Marseillaise, six, seven or even eight hundred yards from the German positions. Though the Germans invaded, it was more often the French who attacked. Long swathes of red and blue corpses littered the stubble fields. The collision was general along the whole battle front, and there was a universal recoil. In the mighty battle of the Frontiers, the magnitude and terror of which is scarcely now known to British consciousness, more than 300,000 Frenchmen were killed, wounded or made prisoners.

However, General Joffre preserved his sangfroid amid these disastrous surprises to an extent which critics have declared almost indistinguishable from insensibility. Unperturbed by his own responsibility he dismissed incom-

petent or even competent subordinates in all quarters. He issued orders for a general retreat of the French armies which contemplated their withdrawal, before resuming the offensive, not merely behind the Marne but behind the Seine, and comprised the isolation or abandonment both of Paris and of Verdun. While these plans were in progress there occurred the much-debated intervention of General Galliéni, the newly constituted Governor of Paris. A whole library of French literature is extant on this famous episode. The partisans of Galliéni seek to prove their case by letters, telegrams, telephonic conversations, orders and established facts. The champions of Joffre minimize these assertions, and rest themselves on the solid declaration that nothing can divert the credit of the victory from the bearer of the prime responsibility.

Galliéni and
the Marne.

From these claims it is possible to draw a reasonable conclusion. The overriding responsibility of the supreme commander remains unassailable. It cannot be more convincingly expressed than in words attributed to Joffre himself. Indiscreetly asked 'Who won the battle of the Marne?' he is said to have replied, 'That, Madame, is a difficult question: but I know who would have lost it, supposing it had been lost.' Joffre and the French Headquarters were withdrawing their armies with the avowed intention of turning on their pursuers and fighting a decisive battle at an early date. Exactly when or where they would fight they had not determined. All the armies were in constant contact, and everything was in flux. But certainly they contemplated making their supreme effort at some moment when the five pursuing German armies were between the horns of Paris and Verdun.

Galliéni's intervention decided this moment and decided it gloriously. He it was who had insisted on the defence of the Capital when Joffre had advocated declaring it an open town. He had inspired the Government to order Joffre to place a field army at his disposal for its defence. When the endless columns of the right-hand German army skirting Paris turned south-east, he decided instantly to strike at their exposed flank with his whole force. He set all his troops in motion towards the east; he convinced

Victory and
Reproach.

Joffre that the moment had come to strike ; and he persuaded him that the flanking thrust should be made to the north rather than to the south of the Marne, as Joffre had purposed. Finally, he struck his blow with all the sureness and spontaneity of military genius ; and the blow heralded the battle whose results saved Europe.

When a Commander-in-Chief in a crisis of war has been demonstrably persuaded to alter his plans by a subordinate of the highest rank, his senior in service, almost his equal in authority, and when this alteration has been followed by a victory of supreme importance, it is evident that the materials of controversy will not be lacking. After the Marne there was a breathing space, and immediately the voice of criticism was raised against the strategy and conduct of General Joffre. To the failure of his war plans and to the dispute about the credit of the Marne was added the charge of defective preparation for war. No other Frenchman had sat in one great position for the three years before the war ; no other man had his responsibility for the condition of the French military resources. The scarcity of machine guns, the want of heavy artillery, the absence even of field-service uniforms could all be laid at his door rather than at any other—not that it follows that anyone else would have done better. Thus while to the world-public and before the enemy and, it must be added, in the eyes of the rank and file of the French armies, Joffre towered up as a grand figure triumphing over the tempest and the victor of the greatest and most decisive battle of history, there flowed all the time a strong subterranean current of well-informed mistrust and opposition.

Joffre, if not a heaven-born general, was unquestionably an impressive personality. His position had become firmly established in relation to the grand scale of events. His sense of proportion had from the outset been extended to the limits of the whole battlefield. No other living man had had the advantages of his standpoint or environment. He was accustomed to think only in terms of armies and groups of armies ; all the other frenzied and frightful detail was definitely beneath his consciousness, as it was beneath

his sphere of duty. Allied to this supreme outlook, which necessarily only a few men in any country can enjoy, Joffre had the physique and temperament exactly suited to the kind of strains he had to bear and the scale of the decisions he had to take. On these solid foundations the splendid position which he occupied and the tremendous events over which he presided soon built up a vast prestige. The censorship, for reasons which certainly had weight, discouraged or forbade both in France and England the 'writing up' of any generals except the Commander-in-Chief in each country. Thus the population of the allied countries knew only Joffre, and even in France it was to Joffre, and Joffre above all others, that the trusting faith of the multitude was month by month and year by year deliberately and mechanically directed.

Nevertheless, as the weary months of trench warfare in 1915 passed away, diversified only by the costly failures of the French offensive in Artois in the spring and in Champagne in the autumn, the currents of hostility gathered continually in volume and intensity. The great popularity of Millerand, who became Minister for War in the early days of the struggle, was slowly sapped through his unswerving loyalty to Joffre, and upon the reconstitution of the French Government under Briand at the end of October, 1915, Millerand disappeared from the scene. He was succeeded as Minister of War by none other than Galliéni.

The relations between Joffre and the new Minister were remarkable. Only age had prevented Galliéni from occupying the supreme post at the outbreak of the war. Joffre had actually served under his orders in a minor capacity in Madagascar. On the declaration of war Galliéni had received a letter from the Minister, approved by Joffre, appointing him Joffre's successor should the command of the French armies fall vacant. The extraordinary part played by Galliéni in the crisis of the Marne has been briefly indicated here, and Joffre was certainly not unconscious of the claims that might arise from it. No sooner was the victory won, than he withdrew the Sixth Army from the control of Galliéni, leaving him again simply Governor of Paris. When in December, 1915, the French armies were

Galliéni
and Joffre.

Galliéni,
Minister of
War.

formed into two groups, Galliéni was anxious to be called to the command of one of them. But Joffre's choice fell elsewhere. Some months later, when the command of the Sixth Army fell vacant, it was offered to Galliéni. But seeing that this command was only a fraction of what he had directed in the Battle of the Marne, Galliéni put the proposal on one side. Finally, on October 1, 1915, Joffre, wishing to place on record once for all his view of Galliéni's contribution to the great victory, had caused to be published in the *Gazette* a citation which gave widespread offence.¹ Galliéni's comment is said to have been: 'I could never serve again under the orders of Joffre.'

But in October, 1915, the rôles are swiftly reversed, and it is Galliéni who holds the superior position, not only as Minister of War, but as a greater soldier, and, in the eyes of many, a greater hero. In the brief portion of Galliéni's life which was lived on the world-stage, no feature bears the sign of true greatness more than his treatment of Joffre. Convinced by Briand that Joffre, whatever his shortcomings, was at that time necessary to the national defence, he supported him in every conceivable manner in the field, and defended him in the Chamber on numerous occasions with loyal comradeship. But while thus to the confusion of his own friends and admirers he paralysed for the time being the hostile movement against Joffre, Galliéni did not fail as a Minister to press for a reform of the many abuses and usurpations of power which had grown up in the Grand Quartier Général at Chantilly. Such was the situation in the French High Command at the period at which this

¹ 'Est cité à l'ordre de l'Armée :

Galliéni, Général, Gouverneur Militaire et Commandant des Armées de Paris, Commandant du camp retranché et des armées de Paris, et placé le 2 septembre 1914 sous les ordres du commandant en chef, a fait preuve des plus hautes qualités militaires :

' En contribuant, par les renseignements qu'il avait recueillis, à déterminer la direction de marche prise par l'aile droite allemande ;

' En orientant judicieusement, pour participer à la bataille, les forces mobiles à sa disposition ;

' En facilitant, par tous les moyens en son pouvoir, l'accomplissement de la mission assignée par le Commandant en chef à ces forces mobiles.'

(Ordre du 25 septembre 1915.)

volume begins, when Kitchener was feverishly seeking to defend Egypt and Falkenhayn was writing a memorandum about Verdun.

France and
the Joffre
Legend.

Every great nation in times of crisis has its own way of doing things. The Germans looked to their Kaiser—the All-Highest—whose word was law—but they also looked after him. In some way or other the changing group of dominating personalities at the head of the German Empire worked the Imperial Oracle. We too in England have our own methods, more difficult to explain to foreigners perhaps than any others—and on the whole more inchoate, more crude, more clumsy. Still—they work. And there is also the French method. Studying French war-politics, one is struck first of all by their extreme complexity. The number of persons involved, the intricacy of their relations, the swiftness and yet the smoothness with which their whole arrangement is continually changed, all baffle the stranger during the event, and weary him afterwards in the tale. The prevailing impression is that of a swarm of bees—all buzzing together, and yet each bee—or nearly every bee—with a perfectly clear idea of what has got to be done in the practical interests of the hive.

At the end of 1915 there were two very definite convictions established in the wide secret circles of France—Ministers, Lobbies, Army, Press, Society—which were actually concerned in the national defence. The first was that Joffre was not Napoleon; the second that his name and fame constituted an invaluable asset to France. 'Unity of Command' was not yet within the bounds of possibility, 'unity of front'—all the fronts in one relation—was already a watchword. If this was to be achieved, and if France was to gain or keep control of the strategy of the allied Powers in all the Conferences and joint decisions that were necessary to coherent military action, what martial figure-head could she produce comparable to Joffre? France—the France that was conducting the war and fighting for life and honour—believed that the name Joffre and the presence of Joffre would impress and dominate the inexperienced but on the whole well-meaning English and carry weight with the remote colossus of Russia. But they

Sir John
French
recalled.

did not like the idea of his leading their remaining armies into further offensives. How then to combine the two desirables? On this basis and with this object a prolonged series of delicate, subtle processes, manœuvres and devices were elaborated. Joffre was to be made a General of Generals, established in Paris out of contact with any particular army, his eye ranging over all, presiding over every inter-allied military conference, brought forward by the French Government to pronounce with commanding authority to allied Cabinets or Statesmen, while the actual conduct of the French armies against Germany would be entrusted to someone else. To this end, and as a first step, Joffre was appointed in November, 1915, to the command of all the French armies, whether in France or in the Orient, and Castelnau was made Major-General at headquarters, an appointment which was intended to carry with it in the highest possible sense the attributes of Chief of the Staff with an implied reversion of the supreme command in France.

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The end of the year brought also a change in the Command of the British Armies in France. We have seen in what circumstances and with what misgivings Sir John French had allowed himself to be involved in the previous September at Loos in the unwisdom of the great French offensive in Champagne. He had conformed with loyalty and ultimately even with ardour to the wishes of Lord Kitchener and to the acquiescence of the British Cabinet. But all this stood him in no stead on the morrow of failure. Those who had not the conviction or resolution to arrest the forlorn attack became easily censorious of its conduct after the inevitable failure. During the course of December proceedings were set on foot by which, at the end of the year, Sir John French was transferred from the Command of the British Army in France to that of the forces at home, and succeeded in that high situation by the Commander of his First Army, Sir Douglas Haig.

These chapters will recount the fall from dazzling situation of many eminent men; and it is perhaps worth while at this point to place the reader on his guard against

unworthy or uncharitable judgments. The Great War wore out or justly or unjustly cast aside leaders in every sphere as lavishly as it squandered the lives of private soldiers—French, Kitchener, Joffre, Nivelle, Cadorna, Jellicoe, Asquith, Briand, Painlevé, and many others, even in the victorious states. All made their contribution and fell. Whatever the pain at the moment to individuals, there are no circumstances of humiliation in such supersessions. Only those who succeeded, who lived through the convulsion and emerged prosperously at the end, know by what obscure twists and turns of chance they escaped a similar lot. ‘Those two impostors,’ Triumph and Disaster, never played their pranks more shamelessly than in the Great War. When men have done their duty and done their best, have shirked no labour and flinched from no decision that it was their task to take, there is no disgrace in eventual personal failure. They are but good comrades who fall in the earlier stages of an assault, which others, profiting by their efforts and experiences, ultimately carry to victory.

The new
Commander-
in-Chief.

Alike in personal efficiency and professional credentials, Sir Douglas Haig was the first officer of the British Army. He had obtained every qualification, gained every experience and served in every appointment requisite for the General Command. He was a Cavalry Officer of social distinction and independent means, whose whole life had been devoted to military study and practice. He had been Adjutant of his regiment ; he had played in its polo team ; he had passed through the Staff College ; he had been Chief Staff Officer to the Cavalry Division in the South African war ; he had earned a Brevet and decorations in the field ; he had commanded a Column ; he had held a command in India ; he had served at the War Office ; he had commanded at Aldershot the two divisions which formed the only organized British army corps, and from this position he had led the First British army corps to France. He had borne the principal fighting part in every battle during Sir John French's command. At the desperate crisis of the first Battle of Ypres, British battalions and batteries, wearied, outnumbered and retreating, had been inspirited

His Credentials.

by the spectacle of the Corps Commander riding slowly forward at the head of his whole staff along the shell-swept Menin Road into close contact with the actual fighting line.

It was impossible to assemble around any other officer a series of appointments and qualifications in any way comparable in their cumulative effects with these. He had fulfilled with exceptional credit every requirement to which the pre-war British military hierarchy attached importance. For many years, and at every stage in his career, he had been looked upon alike by superiors and equals as a man certain to rise, if he survived, to the summit of the British Army. Colonel Henderson, the biographer of Stonewall Jackson, Professor at the Staff College during Haig's graduation, had predicted this event. His conduct in the first year of the war had vindicated every hope. His appointment as Commander-in-Chief on the departure of Sir John French created no surprise, aroused no heart-burnings, excited no jealousy. The military profession reposed in him a confidence which the varied fortunes, disappointments and miscalculations attendant upon three years of war on the greatest scale left absolutely unshaken.

The esteem of his military colleagues found a healthy counterpart in his own self-confidence. He knew the place was his by merit and by right. He knew he had no rivals, and that he owed his place neither to favour nor usurpation. This attitude of mind was invaluable. Allied to a resolute and equable temperament it enabled him to sustain with composure, not only the shocks of defeat and disaster at the hands of the enemy, but those more complex and not less wearing anxieties arising from his relations with French allies and British Cabinets. He was as sure of himself at the head of the British Army as a country gentleman on the soil which his ancestors had trod for generations, and to whose cultivation he had devoted his life. But the Great War owned no Master; no one was equal to its vast and novel issues; no human hand controlled its hurricanes; no eye could pierce its whirlwind dust-clouds. In the course of this narrative it is necessary in the interests of the future to seek and set forth in all sincerity what are believed to be the true facts and

values. But when this process is complete, the fact remains that no other subject of the King could have endured the ordeal which was his lot with the phlegm, the temper, and the fortitude of Sir Douglas Haig.

Decline in
Lord Kit-
chener's
Authority.

* * * * *

The failure of the Dardanelles Expedition was fatal to Lord Kitchener. During the whole of 1915 he had been in sole and plenary charge of the British military operations, and until November on every important point his will had been obeyed. The new Cabinet, like the leading members of the old, had now in their turn lost confidence in his war direction. The conduct of the Gallipoli campaign showed only too plainly the limitations of this great figure at this period of his life and in this tremendous situation both as an organizer and a man of action. His advocacy of the offensive in France which had failed so conspicuously at Loos and in Champagne was upon record. Under the agony of the Gallipoli evacuation his will-power had plainly crumpled, and the long series of contradictory resolves which had marked his treatment of this terrible question was obvious to all who knew the facts.

Already, in November, had come direct rebuff. His plan for a fresh landing in the Gulf of Alexandretta, though devised by him in the actual theatre of operations, had been decisively vetoed by the new War Committee of the Cabinet and by the Allies in conference. In a series of telegrams the inclination of which could scarcely be obscure, he was encouraged to transform his definite mission at the Dardanelles into a general and extensive tour of inspection in the East. His prompt return to London showed that he was not himself unaware of the change in his position. The disposition of the British forces in the East which he made after the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac was certainly not such as to retrieve a waning prestige. It was natural that Egypt should loom disproportionately large in his mind. Almost his whole life had been spent and his fame won there. He now saw this beloved country menaced, as he believed, by an imminent Turkish invasion on a large scale. In an endeavour to ward off the imaginary peril he crowded division after division into Egypt, and evidently

Decline in
Lord Kitchener's
Authority.

contemplated desperate struggles for the defence of the Suez Canal at no distant date. In the early days, at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915, it had been worth while for a score of thousand Turks to threaten the Canal and create as much disturbance as possible in order to delay the movement of troops from India, Australia and New Zealand to the European battlefield. But both the usefulness and feasibility of such an operation were destroyed by the great increase in the scale of the war in the eastern Mediterranean theatre which had been in progress during the whole year. The German and Turkish staffs were well content to rely upon threats and boasting, and to make the proclamation of their intention a substitute for the diversion of armies. 'Egypt,' exclaimed Enver Pasha in December, 'is our objective'; and following this simple deception the British concentration in Egypt was vehemently pursued.

On the top of this came the reverse in Mesopotamia, for which Lord Kitchener had no direct responsibility. General Townshend had marched on Baghdad, and the War Committee was led to believe that he was himself the main-spring of the enterprise. General Nixon, the Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia, had not informed them that his audacious and hitherto brilliantly successful subordinate had in writing recorded his misgivings about the operation. In the event Townshend's force of about 20,000 men was on November 25 forced to retreat after a well-contested action at Ctesiphon and only escaped by a swift and disastrous retreat to a temporary refuge at Kut.

On December 3 the War Committee determined to re-create the Imperial General Staff at the War Office in an effective form. The decision was drastic. The experiment of making a Field-Marshal Secretary of State for War had run its full course. Lord Kitchener might still hold the Seals of Office, but his power, hitherto so overwhelming that it had absorbed and embodied the authority alike of the ministerial and the professional Chiefs, was now to be confined within limits which few politicians would accept in a Secretaryship of State. Sir William Robertson, Chief of the General Staff in France, was brought to Whitehall, and an Order in Council was issued establish-

ing his rights and responsibility in terms both strict and wide. Lord Kitchener acquiesced in the abrogation, not only of the exceptional personal powers which he had enjoyed, but of those which have always been inherent in the office which he retained.

His just
Fame.

The end of his great story is approaching: the long life full of action, lighted by hard-won achievement, crowned by power such as a British subject had rarely wielded and all the regard and honour that Britain and her Empire can bestow, was now declining through the shadows. The sudden onrush of the night, the deep waters of the North, were destined to preserve him and his renown from the shallows.

"Better to sink beneath the shock,
Than moulder piecemeal on the rock."

The solemn days when he stood forth as Constable of Britain beneath whose arm her untrained people braced themselves for war, were ended. His life of duty could only reach its consummation in a warrior's death. His record in the Great War as strategist, administrator and leader, will be judged by the eyes of other generations than our own. Let us hope they will also remember the comfort his character and personality gave to his countrymen in their hours of hardest trial.

CHAPTER II

THE BLOOD TEST

A General Survey—The First Shock—The Five Great Allied Assaults—Battles and the Time Factor—The Great Battle Days—The Battle Weeks—Colonel Boraston's Contentions—Sir William Robertson's Policy—His Reasonings—His Admissions—The Blood Test—British, French and German Losses—The Price of the Offensive—The Casualty Tables—'Killing Germans'—Wearing down the Germans—The Balance of Attrition—The German Intake—Ludendorff's Contribution—The Moral Factor—The General Conclusion—Manœuvre and Surprise—The 'Side Shows'—The Limits of Responsibility.

A General
Survey.

IT is necessary in this chapter to ask the reader, before the campaign of 1916 begins, to take a somewhat statistical view of the whole war in the West, and to examine its main episodes in their character, proportion and relation.

The events divide themselves naturally into three time-periods: the first, 1914; the second, 1915, 1916 and 1917; and the third, 1918: the First Shock; the Deadlock; and the Final Convulsion. The first period is at once the simplest and the most intense. The trained armies of Germany and France rushed upon each other, grappled furiously, broke apart for a brief space, endeavoured vainly to outflank each other, closed again in desperate conflict, broke apart once more, and then from the Alps to the sea lay gasping and glaring at each other not knowing what to do. Neither was strong enough to overcome the other, neither possessed the superior means or method required for the successful offensive. In this condition both sides continued for more than three years unable to fight a general battle, still less to make a strategic advance. It was not until 1918 that the main force of the armies on both sides was simultaneously engaged as in 1914 in a decisive struggle. In short, the war in the West resolved itself into two periods of supreme battle, divided from each other by a three-years' siege.

The scale and intensity of the First Shock in 1914 has not been fully realized even by the well-instructed French public, and is not at all understood in England. At the beginning all totals of casualties were suppressed in every combatant country by a vigorous censorship. Later on in the war when more was known, no one had time to look back in the midst of new perils to the early days ; and since the war no true impression has ever reached the public. British eyes have been fixed upon the vivid pictures of Liège, Mons and Le Cateau, that part of the Battle of the Marne which occurred near Paris, and the desperate struggle round Ypres. The rest lies in a dark background, which it is now possible to illuminate.

The First Shock.

In the first three months of actual fighting from the last week in August to the end of November, when the German drive against the Channel ports had come to an end and the first great invasion was definitely arrested, the French lost in killed, prisoners and wounded 854,000¹ men. In the same period the small British army, about one-seventh of the French fighting strength, lost 85,000² men, making a total Allied loss of 939,000. Against this, in the same period, the Germans lost 677,000.³ The fact that the Germans, although invading and presumably attacking, inflicted greater slaughter than they suffered, is due to the grave errors in doctrine, training and tactics of the French army described in the previous chapter, and to the unsound strategic dispositions of General Joffre. But more than four-fifths of the French losses were sustained in the First Shock. In the fighting from August 21, when the main collision occurred, down to September 12, when the victory of the Marne was definitely accomplished (a period of scarcely three weeks), the French armies lost nearly 330,000 men killed or prisoners, or more than one-sixth of their total loss in killed or prisoners during the whole fifty-two months of the war. To these permanent losses

¹ *Journal Officiel Documents Parlementaires*, Mars 29, 1920.

² *Military Effort of the British Empire*, Monthly Returns.

³ German Federal Archives (*Reichsarchiv*).

See Appendix for details.

The First Shock.

should be added about 280,000 wounded, making a total for this brief period of over 600,000 casualties to the French armies alone ; and of this terrific total three-fourths of the loss was inflicted from August 21 to 24, and from September 5 to 9, that is to say, in a period of less than eight days.

Nothing comparable to this concentrated slaughter was sustained by any combatant in so short a time, not even excluding the first Russian disasters, nor the final phase on the Western Front in 1918. That the French army should have survived this frightful butchery, the glaring miscalculations which caused it, and the long and harassed retreats by which it was attended, and yet should have retained the fighting qualities which rendered a sublime recovery possible, is the greatest proof of their martial fortitude and devotion which History will record. Had this heroic army been handled in the First Shock with prudence, on a wise strategic scheme, and with practical knowledge of the effects of modern firearms and the use of barbed wire and entrenchments, there is no reason to doubt that the German invasion could have been brought to a standstill after suffering enormous losses within from thirty to fifty kilometres of the French frontiers. Instead, as events were cast, the French army in the first few weeks of the war received wounds which were nearly fatal, and never curable.

Of these the gravest was the loss of regular regimental officers, who sacrificed themselves with unbounded devotion. In many battalions only two or three officers survived the opening battles. The cadres of the whole French Army were seriously injured by the wholesale destruction of the trained professional element. The losses which the French suffered in the years which followed were undoubtedly aggravated by this impoverishment of military knowledge in the fighting units. Although the Germans are accustomed to bewail their own heavy losses of officers in the opening battles, their injury was not so deep, and until after the Ludendorff offensives they always possessed the necessary professional staff to teach and handle successive intakes of recruits.

After the situation was stabilized at the end of November, the long period of Siege warfare on the Western Front began. The Germans fortified themselves on French and Belgian soil, along a line chosen for its superior railway network, and the Allies for more than three years endeavoured, with unvarying failure, to break their front and force them to retreat.

The Five
Great Allied
Assaults.

In all, five great Allied assaults were made.

(i) By the French in Champagne and Artois, in the spring and early summer of 1915.

(ii) By the French in Champagne during the late autumn and winter of 1915, and by the British simultaneously at Loos.

(iii) By the British and French on the Somme from July to October, 1916.

(iv) By the British at Arras and by the French on the Aisne, from April to July, 1917, and

(v) By the British virtually alone at Paschendaele in the autumn and winter of 1917.

In these siege-offensives which occupied the years 1915, 1916 and 1917 the French and British Armies consumed themselves in vain, and suffered as will be seen nearly double the casualties inflicted on the Germans. In this same period the Germans made only one great counter-offensive stroke: Falkenhayn's prolonged attack on Verdun in the spring of 1916. The special features which this operation presented will be related in their place.

These sanguinary prodigious struggles, extending over many months, are often loosely described as 'Battles.' Judging by the number of men who took their turn in the fighting at different times, by the immense quantities of guns and shells employed, and by the hideous casualty totals, they certainly rank, taken each as a whole, among the largest events of military history. But we must not be misled by terminology. If to call them 'battles' were merely a method of presenting a general view of an otherwise confusing picture, it might well pass unchallenged. But an attempt has been made by military Commanders and by a whole school of writers to represent these prolonged operations, as events comparable to the decisive

Battles and
the Time
Factor.

battles of the past, only larger and more important. To yield to this specious argument is to be drawn into a wholly wrong impression, both of military science and of what actually took place in the Great War.

What is a battle? I wrote on March 5, 1918: 'War between equals in power . . . should be a succession of climaxes on which everything is staked, toward which everything tends and from which permanent decisions are obtained. These climaxes have usually been called battles. A battle means that the whole of the resources on either side that can be brought to bear are, during the course of a single episode, concentrated upon the enemy.' The scale of a battle must bear due proportion to the whole fighting strength of the armies. Five divisions engaged out of an army of seven may fight a battle. But the same operation in an army of seventy divisions, although the suffering and slaughter are equal, sinks to the rank of a petty combat. A succession of such combats augments the losses without raising the scale of events.

Moreover, a battle cannot, properly speaking, be considered apart from the time factor. By overwhelming the enemy's right we place ourselves in a position to attack the exposed flank or rear of his centre; or by piercing his centre we gain the possibility of rolling up his flanks; or by capturing a certain hill we command his lines of communication. But none of these consequential advantages will be gained if the time taken in the preliminary operation is so long that the enemy can make new dispositions—if, for instance, he can bend back his lines on each side of the rupture and fortify them, or if he can withdraw his army before the hill is taken which would command his communications. If he has time to take such measures effectively, the first battle is over; and the second stage involves a second battle. Now the amount of time required by the enemy is not indefinite. One night is enough to enable a new position to be entrenched and organized. In forty-eight hours the railways can bring large reinforcements of men and guns to any threatened point. The attacker is confronted with a new situation, a different problem, a separate battle. It is a misnomer to

describe the resumption of an attack in these different circumstances as a part of the original battle, or to describe a series of such disconnected efforts as one prolonged battle. Operations consisting of detached episodes extending over months and divided by intervals during which a series of entirely new situations are created, however great their scale, cannot be compared—to take some modern instances—with Blenheim, Rossbach, Austerlitz, Waterloo, Gettysburg, Sedan, the Marne, or Tannenberg.

The Great
Battle
Days.

The real Battle crises of the Great War stand out from the long series of partial, though costly, operations, not only by the casualties but by the number of divisions simultaneously engaged on both sides. In 1914, during the four days from August 21 to 24 inclusive, 80 German divisions were engaged with 62 French, 4 British and 6 Belgian divisions. The four decisive days of the Marne, September 6 to 9 inclusive, involved approximately the same numbers. Practically all the reserves were thrown in on both sides, and the whole strength of the armies utilized to the utmost. The operations in Artois in the spring of 1915, which lasted three months and cost the French 450,000 men,¹ never presented a single occasion where more than 15 divisions were simultaneously engaged on either side. The Battle of Loos-Champagne, beginning on September 25, 1915, comprised an attack by 44 French and 15 British divisions (total 59) upon approximately 30 German divisions. But within three days the decisive battle-period may be said to have passed, and the numbers engaged on the Anglo-French side were reduced rapidly. 1916 was occupied by Verdun and the Somme. In this year of almost continuous fighting, in which more than two and a half million British, French and German soldiers were killed or wounded, there is only one single day, July 1, on the Somme, where as many as 22 Allied divisions were engaged simultaneously. The rest of the Somme with all its slaughter

¹ This figure and other similar figures include the normal wastage of trench warfare on the quiet portions of the front. The official statistics do not enable me to distinguish between the actual battle front and the ordinary front. A uniform deduction of one-eighth would probably be sufficiently correct in all cases.

The Great
Battle
Days.

contained no operations involving more than 18 Allied divisions, and in most cases the time was occupied by combats between 3 or 4 British or French divisions with less than half that number of the enemy. In the whole of the so-called 'Battle of Verdun' there were never engaged on any single day more than 14 French and German divisions, and the really critical opening attack by which the fate of the Fortress was so nearly sealed was conducted by not more than 6 German divisions against 2 or 3 French. In 1917, with the accession of General Nivelle to the French command, an attempt was made to launch a decisive operation, and the French engaged in a single day, though with disastrous results, as many as 28 divisions. Thereafter the operations dwindled again into sanguinary insignificance. The Autumn fighting in Flanders by the British Army produced a long succession of attacks delivered only by from 5 to 15 British divisions.

I wrote in October, 1917 (the reader will come to it in its proper place): 'Success will only be achieved by the *scale and intensity* of our offensive effort within a limited period. We are seeking to conquer the enemy's army and not his position. . . . A policy of pure attrition between armies so evenly balanced cannot lead to a decision. It is not a question of wearing down the enemy's reserves, but of wearing them down so rapidly that recovery and replacement of shattered divisions is impossible. . . . Unless this problem can be solved satisfactorily, we shall simply be wearing each other out on a gigantic scale and with fearful sacrifices without ever reaping the reward.'

It was not until March 21, 1918, when the third and final phase of the war began, that Ludendorff reintroduced the great battle period. The mass of artillery, which the Germans had by then accumulated in the West, was sufficient to enable three or four great offensives to be mounted simultaneously against the Allies, and the power to release any one of these at will imparted the element of Surprise to Ludendorff's operations. The great reserves of which he disposed and which he used, after four years of carnage, with all the ruthlessness of the first invasion, carried the

struggle leap by leap along the whole Western Front, until the entire structure of the opposing armies and all their organizations of attack and defence were strained to the utmost. The climax of the German effort was reached in July. Ludendorff had worn out his army in the grand manner, but thoroughly, and the Allied offensive, supported by an equally numerous artillery, then began. As this developed all the armies became involved in constantly moving battles, and nearly 90 Allied divisions were on numerous days simultaneously engaged with 70 or 80 German. Thus at last a decision was reached.

The Battle
Weeks.

The fundamental proportion of events which the foregoing facts and figures reveal, is more apparent if weeks instead of days are taken as the test. Let us therefore multiply the number of divisions by the number of days in which they were actively engaged in any given week. The 'Battle of the Frontiers' shows from August 21 to 28 about 600 division-battle days. The week of the Marne, September 5 to 12, shows a total of nearly 500. The week of Loos-Champagne in 1915, September 25 to October 2, produces a total of approximately 100. The continuous battle intensity of the first week of Verdun is only 72 divisions and never again attained that level. The opening week of the Somme, also the most important, is 46. General Nivelle's attack in April, 1917, engaged in a week 135. Paschendaele never rose above 85 division-battle days in a single week. With Ludendorff in 1918 we reach the figure of 328 between March 21 and 28. All through the summer of 1918 the weeks repeatedly show 300 entries by divisions of all the armies into battle: and finally, Foch's general advance, August, September and October, attained the maximum intensity of 554 divisional engagements a week and maintained an average weekly intensity in the fiercest month of over 400.

* * * * *

I conceive myself entitled to repeat, now that the results are known, the opinions which I put on record before all these battles were fought. I wrote to the Prime Minister on December 29, 1914, as follows: 'I think it quite possible that neither side will have the strength to penetrate the

Colonel
Boraston's
Contentions.

other's lines in the Western theatre . . . Without attempting to take a final view, my impression is that the position of both armies is not likely to undergo any decisive change.' And in June, 1915: 'It is a fair general conclusion that the deadlock in the West will continue for some time and the side which risks most to pierce the lines of the other will put itself at a disadvantage.'

When the Comte de Ségur wrote his captivating account of Napoleon's Russian campaign, the defence of the Emperor was undertaken by General Gourgaud, a highly placed officer of his staff, which defence produced a far less favourable impression of Napoleon than had resulted from the original criticism. In 1922 a book entitled *Sir Douglas Haig's Command 1915-1918* was published by a member of his staff, Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Boraston. This gentleman was employed during the greater part of the period concerned in drafting and preparing the official communiqués. He thus had access to many forms of confidential information, and he watched the great events of the war in relationship to a chief who had gained his whole-hearted admiration. His work is aggressive to a degree that sometimes ceases to be good-natured. It is marred by small recriminations, by an air of soreness, by a series of literary sniffs and snorts, which combine to produce an unpleasant impression on the mind of the general reader.

For the views expressed in this book Sir Douglas Haig is in no way responsible. But the point of view which it discloses is nevertheless of interest. With all its faults, indeed to some extent because of them, *Sir Douglas Haig's Command* is a document of real value. It represents and embodies more effectively the collective view of the British Headquarters upon the different phases of the struggle than any other work which has yet appeared. There are none of those reticences and suave phrasings with which the successful actors on the world-stage are often contented when they condescend to tell their tale. Here we have the record of actual feelings unadorned. We have also a wealth of secret information for the first time placed at the disposal of the public in a responsible and authentic form. The public are therefore under an

obligation to Colonel Boraston, and if from time to time in these pages his views are treated somewhat controversially, that should in no way obscure the service he has rendered to every one except his Chief.

This Staff Officer is throughout concerned to sustain the theme of Sir Douglas Haig's final despatch. The Western Front was at all times, according to this view, the decisive theatre of the war, and all the available forces should continually have been concentrated there. The only method of waging war on the Western Front was by wearing down the enemy by 'killing Germans in a war of attrition.' This we are assured was always Sir Douglas Haig's scheme; he pursued it unswervingly throughout his whole Command. Whether encouraged or impeded by the Cabinet, his policy was always the same: 'Gather together every man and gun and wear down the enemy by constant and if possible by ceaseless attacks.' This in the main, it is contended, he succeeded in doing, with the result, it is claimed, that in August, 1918, the enemy, at last worn down, lost heart, crumpled, and finally sued for peace. Viewing the events in retrospect Colonel Boraston invites us to see, not only each of the various prolonged offensives as an integral operation, but the whole four years, 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918, as if they were one single enormous battle every part of which was a necessary factor in the final victory. We wore the enemy down, we are told, upon the Somme in 1916, we wore him down at Arras in the spring, we continued to wear him down at Paschendaele in the winter of 1917. If the army had been properly reinforced by the politicians we should have persisted in wearing him down in the spring of 1918. Finally, as the fruits of all this process of attrition and 'killing Germans' by offensive operations, the enemy's spirit was quelled, his man power was exhausted, and the war was won. Thus a great design, measured, foreseen and consciously prepared, reached its supreme accomplishment. Such is the theory.

These views are supported in the two important volumes lately published by Sir William Robertson. This officer was Chief of the Imperial General Staff with unprecedented powers during the whole of 1916 and 1917. Robertson's

Sir William
Robertson's
Policy.

doctrines were clear and consistent. He believed in concentrating all the efforts of the British and French armies upon offensive action in France and Flanders, and that we should stand on the defensive everywhere else. He advocated and pressed every offensive in which the British armies were engaged, and did his utmost to procure the compliance of the Cabinet in every operation. In an illuminating sentence he complained that 'certain Ministers still held fast to the belief that victory could never be won—or only at prohibitive cost—by *straightforward action on the Western Front*,¹ and that it must be sought through lines of indirect attack elsewhere.'² 'Straightforward action on the Western Front,' in 1915 (when Robertson was Chief of the Staff in France) and in 1916 and 1917 (when he was C.I.G.S.), meant, and could only mean, frontal assaults upon fortified positions defended by wire and machine guns without the necessary superiority of numbers, or an adequate artillery, or any novel offensive method. He succeeded in enforcing this policy against the better judgment of successive Cabinets or War Councils, with the result that when he left the War Office in February, 1918, the British and French armies were at their weakest point in strength and fighting power, and the Germans for the first time since the original invasion had gathered so great a superiority of reserves as to be able to launch a gigantic attack.

Robertson's explanations of the costly failures of the successive offensives for which he was so largely responsible are worth quoting. Of the disastrous battles of Loos and Champagne which cost the French 350,000 casualties and the British 95,000 in September and October, 1915, he writes :

'Although the operations were unproductive of decisive success, and were attended by tactical miscalculations which would have to be corrected before the enemy's lines could be breached, they nevertheless rendered valuable aid to an ally in distress, and furnished useful experience in the handling of new troops and in the methods to be

¹ My italics.

² *Soldiers and Statesmen*, 1914-1918 : Robertson. Vol. I, p. 239.

employed in the attack on continuous lines of field fortifications. They were, in fact, necessary stages in the preparation for the great battles that were subsequently fought.' ¹

His Reason-
ings.

To obtain 'useful experience in the handling of new troops' and educational preparation for future battles may be deemed an inadequate result for 95,000 British casualties.

During the battle of the Somme he wrote, on July 29, to Haig as follows :

'The powers that be are beginning to get a little uneasy in regard to the situation. The casualties are mounting up, and Ministers are wondering whether we are likely to get a proper return for them. I do my best to keep the general situation to the front, and to explain what may be the effect of our efforts, and to ask what alternative could be adopted. I also try to make them think in German of the present situation. But they will persist in asking me whether *I* think a loss of, say, 300,000 men will lead to really great results, because if not we ought to be content with something less than what we are now doing, and they constantly inquire why we are fighting and the French are not . . . In general, what is bothering them is the probability that we may soon have to face a bill of between 200,000 and 300,000 casualties with no very great gains additional to the present. It is thought that the primary object—the relief of Verdun—has to some extent been achieved.' ²

And three days later :

'L.G. is all right provided I can say that *I* am satisfied, and to enable me to say this it is necessary you should keep me acquainted with your views. . . . If I have to depend almost entirely upon Press communiqués my opinion is not much more valuable than that of anyone else.' ³

But his was the opinion that overbore all others ; and that it should have depended upon these and similar jejune reflections and on such defective information excites, even after the lapse of years, a painful emotion.

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 270.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 271.

His Admissions.

When on October 5, 1917, the Paschendaele offensive was sinking into the mire, and the Cabinet sought to bring it to a conclusion, Robertson was compelled to rest himself upon 'the unsatisfactory state of the French armies and of the general political situation in France, which was still far from reassuring';¹ and again: 'The original object of the campaign—the clearance of the Belgian coast—was seen to be doubtful of attainment long before the operations terminated, owing to the bad weather experienced and to the delay in starting caused by the change of plan earlier in the year. But, as already explained, there were strong reasons why activity had to be maintained. We must give the French armies time to recover their strength and morale, make every effort to keep Russia in the field in some form or other, and try to draw enemy troops to Flanders which might otherwise be sent against Italy, especially after her defeat at Caporetto. All these purposes of distraction were achieved, and in addition heavy losses were inflicted upon the German armies.''²

For these 'purposes of distraction' the killing, maiming or capture of over 400,000 British soldiers was apparently considered a reasonable price to pay.

It appears however that although Robertson drove the Cabinet remorselessly forward, he had convinced himself that none of the British attacks for which he bore responsibility in 1915 and in 1916 had had any chance of decisive success. 'With respect to the alleged error of always attacking where the enemy was strongest,' he writes,³ 'I could not refrain from saying that the greatest of all errors was that of not providing before the war an army adequate to enforce the policy adopted. . . . *Until this year we have not had the means to attack with the hope of getting a decision,*⁴ and therefore we have had no choice in the point of attack.' He used these words on his own avowal on June 21, 1917; so that the highest expert authority responsible for procuring the support of the Cabinet to two years of offensive operations had already convinced

¹ *Soldiers and Statesmen*, 1914-1918: Robertson. Vol. II, p. 256.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 261-2.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 244.

⁴ My italics

himself that up till 1917 the British Army 'had not the means to attack with the hope of getting a decision.' Undeterred however by this slowly-gained revelation, he proceeded to drive the unfortunate Ministers to authorize the prolongation into the depths of winter of the Paschendaele offensive.

The Blood
Test.

* * * * *

During the war it was the custom of the British and French staffs to declare that in their offensives they were inflicting far heavier losses on the Germans than they themselves suffered. Similar claims were advanced by the enemy. Ludendorff shared the professional outlook of the British and French High Commands. Even after the war was over, with all the facts in his mind or at his disposal had he cared to seek them, we find him writing, 'Of the two [policies], the offensive makes less demands on the men and gives no higher losses.'¹ Let us subject these assertions and theories of the military schools of the three great belligerents to a blood test as pitiless as that to which they all in turn doomed their valiant soldiers.

Since the Armistice the facts are known; but before proceeding to detailed figures it will be well to take a general survey.

The Germans, out of a population of under 70 millions, mobilized during the war for military service 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ million persons. Of these, according to the latest German official figures for all fronts including the Russian, over 7 millions suffered death, wounds or captivity, of whom nearly 2 millions perished.² France, with a population of 38 millions, mobilized a little over 8 million persons. This however includes a substantial proportion of African troops outside the French population basis. Of these approximately 5 millions became casualties, of whom 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ millions lost their lives. The British Empire, out of a white population of 60 millions, mobilized nearly 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ million persons and sustained over 3 million casualties including nearly a million deaths.

¹ *My War Memories*: Ludendorff. Vol. II.

² *Zentral Nachweiseamt*. This figure is also given by the French military historian, Lieut.-Col. Corda, *La Guerre Mondiale*, p. 413.

British,
French and
German
Losses.

The British totals are not directly comparable with those of France and Germany. The proportion of coloured troops is greater. The numbers who fell in theatres other than the western, and those employed on naval service, are both much larger.

The French and German figures are however capable of very close comparison. Both the French and German armies fought with their whole strength from the beginning to the end of the war. Each nation made the utmost possible demand upon its population. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the official French and German figures tally with considerable exactness. The Germans mobilized 19 per cent. of their entire population, and the French, with their important African additions, 21 per cent. Making allowance for the African factor, it would appear that in the life-and-death struggle both countries put an equal strain upon their manhood. If this basis is sound—and it certainly appears reasonable—the proportion of French and German casualties to persons mobilized displays an even more remarkable concordance. The proportion of German casualties to total mobilized is 10 out of every 19, and that of the French 10 out of every 16. The ratios of deaths to woundings in Germany and France are almost exactly equal, viz. 2 to 5. Finally these figures yield a division of German losses between the western and all other fronts of approximately 3 to 1 both in deaths and casualties. All the calculations which follow are upon the basis of the tables which yield these authoritative and harmonious general proportions.

The British War Office published in March, 1922, its *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War*.¹ A section of this massive compilation records the comparative figures of British and German casualties on the British sector of the Western Front from February, 1915, to October, 1918, inclusive. The British figures are compiled from the official records of the War Office. The German figures have been obtained from the Federal Archives Office at Potsdam. The result of the

¹ Hereafter referred to as *The Military Effort*.

calculation is summed up as follows: The total number of British 'Officer' casualties was 115,741 and of German 'Officer' casualties 47,256. The total number of British 'Other Ranks' casualties was 2,325,932 and of German 'Other Ranks' casualties 1,633,140. The casualties among British 'Officers' compared to German were therefore about 5 to 2, and of British 'Other Ranks' compared to German about 3 to 2.

Comparative tables are given in the same work which show the losses of both sides in the various offensive periods.¹

BRITISH OFFENSIVES OF 1916 AND 1917

	OFFICERS ²		OTHER RANKS	
	British.	German.	British.	German.
1916. July-December THE SOMME	21,974	4,879	459,868	231,315
	over 4-1		about 2-1	
1917 January-June ARRAS and MESSINES	15,198	3,953	295,803	172,962
	about 4-1		about 5-3	
1917 July-December PASCHENDAELE and CAMBRAI	22,316	6,913	426,298	263,797
	about 3-1		about 5-3	
TOTALS . . .	59,488	15,745	1,181,969	668,074
	about 4-1		nearly 2-1	

There is no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of these authoritative and official calculations, nor the truth of the picture they present. But since 1918 supplementary casualty returns have been presented both in Germany and Britain which must be brought into the account. They do not materially alter the

¹ *The Military Effort*, pp. 358 *et seq.*

² The German commissioned officers were less numerous per unit than in the British Service.

The Casualty Tables.

picture.¹ The two tables printed facing this page show in their simplest form the respective total casualties suffered and inflicted according to the latest information by all the three main combatants on the Western Front.

¹ The campaigns have been divided into the main operations and the intervening periods, in accordance with the return of French casualties presented to the Chamber in response to the resolution obtained by the deputy Marin on March 29, 1922. The French figures are taken from this source, which is the latest and sole authoritative statement of the French casualties. The British figures are taken from the monthly returns of casualties published in *The Military Effort*.^{*} These are the official figures of the War Office, and the final corrections and additions[†] are also embodied.

For the German figures there are two sources: first, the Federal Archives Office at Potsdam (*Reichsarchiv*) which collected the casualties returned every ten days by the units; and secondly, the Central Inquiry Office (*Zentral Nachweiseamt*) which, working separately, received the periodical returns from all the hospitals at the front and at home. The classification of the casualties into periods is the work of the *Reichsarchiv*. They accepted the figures as recorded at the end of the war, and have classified them in the same operation periods as those chosen by the French. The Central Inquiry Office, which includes the War Graves Administration, continued however to revise the casualty returns, and in particular to break up the large category of 'Missing' which existed at the end of the war. As missing men were finally despaired of or proved to have been killed, as wounded men after long illness died, these were added to the total deaths, and the other categories reduced accordingly. Moreover, the revision of casualties in accordance with the hospital records increased the total number. In five successive estimates ending with June, 1923, the *Nachweiseamt* added 497,000 casualties to the total at the Armistice, on which the *Reichsarchiv* had worked: and their final figure becomes 7,080,000 German casualties on all fronts out of a total mobilization of 13,250,000.

It is not possible to distribute these additional German casualties according to the time or operation periods of the *Reichsarchiv*'s calculation; nor to divide them between the Western and Eastern theatres of the war. In order to make sure that I am in no way overstraining the argument, I have added four-fifths of the 497,000 supplementary German casualties, viz. 397,000, to the Western Front. This is admittedly an arbitrary method. But in so far as it errs, it is upon the safe side. Moreover, the *Reichsarchiv*'s figures for the Western Front admittedly do not include either casualties inflicted upon the Germans by the Americans, which may be estimated at 140,000; nor the very heavy German casualties for part of October and the last eleven days of the war in November, 1918. In the confusion of the collapse on the Western Front a temporary break-

^{*} p. 271.

[†] pp. 237 *et seq.*

Perio

Aug.-Nov., 1

Dec., 1914-J

Feb.-Mar., 1

Apr.-June, 1

July-Aug., 1

Sept.-Nov., 1

Dec., 1915-J

Feb.-June, 1

July-Oct., 19

Nov.-Dec., 1

Jan.-Mar., 19

Apr.-July, 19

Aug.-Dec., 1

Jan.-Feb., 19

Mar.-June, 1

July-Nov., 1

FOOTNOTE 6

read

OF WHICH (a)

(b)

¹ One-eigh

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recording than

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It would not be right to claim for any elaborate set of figures built up under such varying circumstances an exact and meticulous accuracy; nor is such exactness necessary for the use to which the figures are put in this account. The authority for every set of figures is given. All the modifications which are required have been made, and in the result I believe it to be a sound and correct presentation of fact.

* * * * *

Let us now proceed to draw the conclusions which emerge from the figures. They do not appear to have been at all appreciated even in the most expert circles. I state them in their simplest form.

During the whole war the Germans never lost in any phase of the fighting more than the French whom they fought, and frequently inflicted double casualties upon them.

In no one of the periods into which the fighting has been divided by the French authorities, did the French come off best in killed, prisoners and wounded. Whether they were on the defensive or were the attackers the result was the same. Whether in the original rush of the invasion, or in the German offensive at Verdun, or in the great French assaults on the German line, or even in the long periods of wastage on the trench warfare front, it always took the blood of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 Frenchmen to inflict a corresponding injury upon a German.

The second fact which presents itself from the tables down occurred in the returns made by the various German units. This is the chief explanation of the increase of nearly 500,000 discovered and reported by the Central Inquiry Office in the following twelve months.

It does not seem therefore that the additional 397,000 German casualties should be spread over the whole period of the war. By far the larger portion occurred in the last few months. If uniform allowance were made for this addition, it would increase all the German figures in the comparative tables by about 8 per cent. But the British figures in these tables have also undergone a progressive revision. Allowing for the fact that they do not include 102,000 British casualties of 1914, their original total fell short of the British final total by 222,000. This number, if distributed, would add almost exactly the same percentage to the British numbers. The effect of these changes therefore leaves the comparison unaltered.

'Killing
Germans.'

'Killing
Germans.'

is that in all the British offensives the British casualties were never less than 3 to 2, and often nearly double the corresponding German losses.

However, comparing the French and British efforts against the Germans on the Western Front, the French suffered in all the periods concerned irrespective of the kind of operation heavier losses than those they inflicted on the enemy: whereas while the British suffered heavier losses in all offensives, they exacted more than their own losses when attacked by the Germans.

In the series of great offensive pressures which Joffre delivered during the whole of the spring and autumn of 1915, the French suffered nearly 1,300,000 casualties. They inflicted upon the Germans in the same period and the same operations 506,000 casualties. They gained no territory worth mentioning, and no strategic advantages of any kind. This was the worst year of the Joffre régime. Gross as were the mistakes of the Battle of the Frontiers, glaring as had been the errors of the First Shock, they were eclipsed by the insensate obstinacy and lack of comprehension which, without any large numerical superiority, without adequate artillery or munitions, without any novel mechanical method, without any pretence of surprise or manœuvre, without any reasonable hope of victory, continued to hurl the heroic but limited manhood of France at the strongest entrenchments, at uncut wire and innumerable machine guns served with cold skill. The responsibilities of this lamentable phase must be shared in a subordinate degree by Foch, who under Joffre's orders, but as an ardent believer, conducted the prolonged Spring offensive in Artois, the most sterile and prodigal of all.

During the Somme in 1916, where the brunt of the slaughter was borne by the British, the French and German losses were much less unequal. But, on the other hand, their rigid method of defence at Verdun, which will be presently described, led the French to suffer in a far greater degree even than the attacking Germans.

In the face of the official figures now published and set out in the tables, what becomes of the argument of the 'battle of attrition'? If we lose three or four times

as many officers and nearly twice as many men in our attack as the enemy in his defence, how are we wearing him down? The result of every one of these offensives was to leave us relatively weaker—and in some cases terribly weaker—than the enemy. The aggregate result of all of them from 1915 to 1917 (after deducting the losses on both sides in the German attack on Verdun) was a French and British casualty list of 4,123,000 compared to a German total of 2,166,000. Not only is this true of numbers, but also of the quality of the troops. In the attack it is the bravest who fall. The loss is heaviest among the finest and most audacious fighters. In defence the casualties are spread evenly throughout the total number exposed to the fire. The process of attrition was at work; but it was on our own side that its ravages fell, and not on the German.

Wearing
down the
Germans.

It may be contended that if one side is much more numerous than the other it may 'wear down' the enemy, as Grant sought vainly to wear down the Confederates before Richmond in 1864, even at a cost of two to one. But this argument cannot be applied to the struggle on the Western Front. First, the Allies never had the superiority to afford such an uneven sacrifice of life. Secondly, the German annual intake of recruits was large enough to repair the whole of their permanent loss in any year.

Let us here examine the total German losses on the Western Front.

Casualties inflicted on the Germans¹

	by		
	<i>British.</i>	<i>French.²</i>	<i>Total.</i>
1914 . . (say)	100,000	748,000 ³	848,000
1915 . . .	116,000	536,000	652,000
1916 . . .	291,000	673,000	964,000
1917 . . .	448,000	436,000	884,000
1918 . . .	818,000	680,000	1,498,000
<i>Total</i> . . .	<i>1,773,000</i>	<i>3,072,000</i>	<i>4,846,000⁴</i>

¹ See Table B. ² Including losses inflicted by the Belgians.

³ 100,000 deducted for British share, no separate figures being available.

⁴ These figures take no account of the supplementary German casualties not distributed into periods.

The Balance
of Attrition.

From the tables of killed, missing, prisoners and wounded it is necessary to extract the permanent loss to the Army, i.e. men rendered incapable of taking any further part in the war. For this purpose we include all the killed, missing and prisoners and one-third only of the wounded. On this basis the total permanent German loss in the West during the three years of siege warfare was as follows:—

1915	337,000
1916	549,000
1917	510,000
<i>Total</i>	1,396,000 ¹

Thus in the three years of siege conditions the losses of the Germans on the Western Front averaged 465,000 a year. Their annual intake of recruits through young men growing up was over 800,000. But, in their hard need, and often through the ardour of their young men, they heavily anticipated their annual harvests. From May, the normal conscription month, to the end of 1915, they drew 1,070,000 men to the Colours.² In the similar period of 1916 they overdrew no less than 1,443,000 men. Thus, in 1917 they could call up only 622,000. Nevertheless, the least of these figures far exceeded the attrition value of the Allied offensives. It was not until 1918 that the intake of available Germans fell to 405,000. It would probably, if the national resistance had not collapsed, have risen in 1919, for the ample crops of German youth were steadily coming forward at 800,000 a year. The figures of German loss and intake for the three Siege years are therefore as follows:—

	Loss in the West.	Total Intake.	Balance for all Fronts.
1915	337,000	1,070,000	733,000
1916	549,000	1,443,000	894,000
1917	510,000	622,000	112,000
<i>Totals</i>	1,396,000	3,135,000	1,739,000

¹ No allowance is made in these figures for the supplementary German casualties, since these could at most vary the totals to the extent of 8 per cent. See footnote to p. 52.

² These figures include sick and wounded who had recovered and men combed from industries.

Where then in mere attrition was the end to be discerned? On the terms of 1915, 1916, and 1917 the German man power was sufficient to last indefinitely. In fact in the three years of the Allied offensives on the Western front they gained actually to the extent of 1,739,000 men more than their losses. We were in fact, as I wrote early in March, 1918, 'merely exchanging lives upon a scale at once more frightful than anything that has been witnessed before in the world, and too modest to produce a decision.'¹

Luden-
dorff's Con-
tribution.

It was not until 1918 that the change fatal for Germany occurred. There was one period in the warfare between the British and Germans in which the relative losses are strikingly reversed. That period is not, as the casual reader might expect, when our troops were gaining ground, storming trench lines, pulverizing fortified villages, gathering prisoners and the grisly spoils of battle, and when our propaganda, domestic and external, was eagerly proclaiming that the tide of victory flowed. It was during the period which probably in most people's minds represents the most agonizing and alarming phase of the war on the Western Front, the days of the greatest German victories and the most grievous British reverses. For the first time in Ludendorff's tremendous offensive of 1918, in the battles following the twenty-first of March and in the battles of the Lys, the German losses in men and officers, in killed and wounded, especially killed, and above all in officers killed, towered up above those of the troops whom they thought they were defeating, and whom we knew they were driving back.

It was their own offensive, not ours, that consummated their ruin. They were worn down not by Joffre, Nivelle and Haig, but by Ludendorff. See again the remorseless figures from March 21, 1918, to the end of June.² In barely three months the Germans suffered against the British alone 16,000 officer casualties and 419,000 casualties among the other ranks. They lost in almost the same period³ against the British alone, 3,860 officers

¹ My memorandum of March 5, 1918, printed in Chapter XVII.

² *Military Effort*, p. 62.

³ Including the quiet month of July.

The Moral
Factor.

killed compared with 3,878 officers killed by the British in the whole preceding two years. Against the French in the same three months, but mainly in the last five weeks, the Germans lost 253,000 officers and men. Their total casualties in only thirteen weeks amounted to 688,000, very few of whom in the short time that was left ever returned to the front. In this period their intake was reduced to 405,000 for the nine months of the year that the war lasted. Therefore they consumed nearly 700,000 men in a time when their corresponding intake did not exceed 150,000. Here then was the wearing down which, coming at the moment when the German national spirit was enfeebled by its exertions during four years and by the cumulative effects of the blockade, led to the German retreat on the Western Front; to the failure to make an effective withdrawal to the Antwerp-Meuse line with all the bargaining possibilities that this afforded, and to the sudden final collapse of German resistance in November, 1918.

But, it will be said, numerical attrition is not the only test, there is moral attrition which wears down the will power of an enemy who is constantly being attacked. He has to yield ground; he loses prisoners, guns, and trophies; he sees the strongest defences stormed; his battle line is constantly receding. It is this experience which wears him out in spite of the fact that he is killing two or often three assailants for each of his own men slain. It may be conceded that the ordeal of the defending troops in modern warfare is no less trying than that of the attacker. But after all there is no greater stimulus to the soldier in his agony than the knowledge of the loss he is inflicting on his foe. Crouched by his machine gun amid the awful bombardment he sees long lines mowed down, wave after wave, in hundreds and in thousands. He knows how few and far between are the defenders, he sees how many are their targets. With every attack repulsed he gains fresh confidence, and when at last he is overwhelmed there are others behind him who know what is happening and which side is suffering most.

But let us test the theory of moral attrition also by the facts. Can it be disputed that the confidence of the German armies was increased as well as their relative numerical

strength by the repulse of the British and French at Loos and Champagne in 1915? Did these battles induce them to weaken in any way their pressure upon Russia? Was it not during these very battles that German divisions conquered Serbia and overran the Balkans? Was not the German High Command at the height of the Somme offensive able to withdraw more than a dozen divisions from the various fronts to strike down Roumania? Which army exulted over the great Nivelle offensive in 1917? Who emerged with the greatest confidence from the prolonged fighting which followed the Battle of Arras? What were the relative positions of the British and German Armies at the end of Paschendale—the British exhausted, shot to pieces, every division having to be reduced from thirteen to ten battalions; the Germans training, resting, gathering their reinforcements from Russia for a greater effort than any they had yet made?

The General Conclusion.

It is certain, surveying the war as a whole, that the Germans were strengthened relatively by every Allied offensive—British or French—launched against them, until the summer of 1918. Had they not squandered their strength in Ludendorff's supreme offensive in 1918, there was no reason why they should not have maintained their front in France practically unaltered during the whole of the year, and retreated at their leisure during the winter no farther than the Meuse.

But, it will be said, if the conditions over a prolonged period are such that all offensives are equally injurious to the attacker, how then is war to be waged? Are both sides to sit down with enormous armies year after year looking at each other, each convinced that whoever attacks will be the loser? Is this the sterile conclusion to which the argument tends? What positive courses should have been adopted? No one need go so far as to say that every Allied offensive could have been avoided. Indeed, there were at least five examples of short sudden 'set piece' attacks—the opening of the battle of Arras, the capture of the Messines Ridge, the French recaptures of Fort Douaumont and of Malmaison, and the first day's battle of Cambrai—which in themselves

Manœuvre
and Sur-
prise.

were brilliant events. All of these, if they had ended with the fruits of the initial surprise, would have been more costly in men as well as in repute to the Germans than to the Allies. It is indeed by such episodes that the prestige of an 'active defensive' might have been maintained. But the question is whether it was wise policy to seek and pursue prolonged offensives on the largest scale in order to wear down the enemy by attrition; whether instead of seeking the offensive ourselves in France, both British and French ought not consistently on all occasions to have endeavoured to compel the enemy to attack. If our whole strategy and tactics had been directed to that end, would not the final victory have been sooner won?

Once the enemy was committed to the attack we could have exacted a cruel forfeit. It would have been his part, not ours, to crunch the barbed wire and gorge machine guns with the noblest sacrifices of youth. And need the tale have ended there? The use of force for the waging of war is not to be regulated simply by firm character and text-book maxims. Craft, foresight, deep comprehension of the verities, not only local but general; stratagems, devices, manœuvres, all of these on the grand scale are demanded from the chiefs of great armies.

Suppose we—both French and British—have trained our armies behind the trench line to a high standard of flexible manœuvring efficiency; suppose we have permanently fortified with concrete and every modern device those portions of the front where we cannot retreat; suppose we have long selected and shrewdly weakened those portions where we could afford to give 20 or 30 kilometres of ground; suppose we lure the enemy to attack there and make great pockets and bulges in a thin and yielding front, and then, just as he thinks himself pressing on to final victory, strike with independent counter-offensive on the largest scale and with deeply planned railways, not at his fortified trench line, but at the flanks of a moving, quivering line of battle! Are there not combinations here which at every stage would sell ground only subject to the full blood tax, and finally offer to brave, fresh, well-trained troops the opportunities of sudden and glorious victory?

And why should the view be limited to the theatre in which the best and largest armies happen to face each other? Sea power, railway communications, foreign policy, present the means of finding new flanks outside the area of deadlock. Mechanical science offers on the ground, in the air, on every coast, from the forge or from the laboratory, boundless possibilities of novelty and surprise. Suppose for instance the war power represented by the 450,000 French and British casualties in the Champagne-Loos battle of 1915 had been used to force the Dardanelles or to combine the Balkan States!

The Side Shows.

Let us, to cultivate a sense of proportion, digress for a moment from the Western Front to the 'side-shows' of the war—many of them in themselves ill-judged—in order to measure the distribution of our total war power. A calculation has been made by the War Office and published in *The Military Effort*¹ on the basis, not of course of casualties, but of the men employed in any theatre multiplied by the number of days so employed. From this the following proportions are derived, taking the effort at the Dardanelles as the unit.

MAN-DAYS
(Officers Excluded)

Dardanelles	.	.	.	.	.	1·00
Salonica	.	.	.	.	.	6·40
North Russia	.	.	.	.	.	·08
Palestine	.	.	.	.	.	12·20
Mesopotamia	.	.	.	.	.	11·80
East Africa	.	.	.	.	.	8·20
France	.	.	.	.	.	73·00

And is there not also a virtue in 'saving up'? We never gave ourselves the chance. We had to improvise our armies in face of the enemy. The flower of the nation, its manhood, its enterprise, its brains were all freely given. But there never was found the time to train and organize these elements before they were consumed. From the priceless metal successive half-sharpened, half-tempered weapons were made, were used and broken as soon as they were fashioned,

¹ p. 742 *et seq.*

The Limits
of Respon-
sibility.

and then replaced by others similarly unperfected. The front had to be defended, the war had to be waged, but there was surely no policy in eagerly *seeking* offensives with immature formations or during periods when no answer to the machine gun existed. Suppose that the British Army sacrificed upon the Somme, the finest we ever had, had been preserved, trained and developed to its full strength till the summer of 1917, till perhaps 3,000 tanks were ready, till an overwhelming artillery was prepared, till a scientific method of continuous advance had been devised, till the apparatus was complete, might not a decisive result have been achieved at one supreme stroke?

It will be said—What of the Allies—what of Russia—what of Italy, would they have endured so long, while France and Britain perfected their plans and accumulated their power? But if direct aid had come to Russia through the destruction of Turkey, and to Italy through the marshalling of the Balkans against Austria, might not both these states have been spared the disasters to which they were in fact exposed? And is there any use in fighting a prolonged offensive in which the attacker suffers without strategic gain nearly double the loss of the defenders? How does the doing of an unwise, costly and weakening act help an Ally? Is not any temporary relief to him of pressure at the moment paid for by him with compound interest in the long run? What is the sense of attacking only to be defeated: or of 'wearing down the enemy' by being worn down more than twice as fast oneself? The uncontrollable momentum of war, the inadequacy of unity and leadership among Allies, the tides of national passion, nearly always *force* improvident action upon Governments or Commanders. Allowance must be made for the limits of their knowledge and power. The British commanders were throughout deeply influenced by the French mood and situation. But do not let us obscure the truth. Do not found conclusions upon error. Do not proclaim its melancholy consequences as the perfect model of the art of war or as the triumphant consummation of a great design.

CHAPTER III

FALKENHAYN'S CHOICE

Falkenhayn's Position — Attack the Strong or the Weak—
Falkenhayn's Achievement in 1915—The Rejected Remedy of
the Allies—The Initiative returns to Germany—The Politics
of Roumania—Roumania at the Outbreak of War—Roumanian
Policy in 1915—Her Isolation at Christmas—The Salonica
Expedition—Influence of Lloyd George and Briand—Still not
too late—Power of the Unexpected—Falkenhayn's Memo-
randum—East or West—His Decision—Examination of his
Policy—Need to win Roumania—Breaking the Blockade by
Land—Roumania or Verdun.

THE opening scene of the year 1916 lies in the Cabinet
of the German Main Headquarters, and the principal
figure is General von Falkenhayn, the virtual Commander-
in-Chief of the Central Empires. On the evening of
September 14, 1914, Falkenhayn, then Minister of War,
had been appointed by the Emperor Chief of the German
General Staff. From this post General von Moltke, who,
when the decision of the Marne had become unmistak-
able, had said to the Emperor: 'Your Majesty, we have
lost the war,' had retired, broken in health and heart. The
new Director of the German Army also retained for a time
his position as Minister of War; and when early in the New
Year he ceded this latter post, it was to a nominee of his own.
Falkenhayn was therefore armed with the fullest powers, and
during a period of almost exactly two years he continued
to wield them undisputed. He had succeeded to a stricken
inheritance. The great stake had been played and lost
by his predecessor. The rush on Paris, trampling down
Belgium, and with it all hope of ending the war by one
blow, had failed. It had cost Germany her good name
before the world, it had brought into the field against
her the sea power, the wealth and the evergrowing

Falken-
hayn's
Position.

Attack the
Strong or
the Weak.

military strength of the British Empire. In the East the defeat of the Austrians in the Battle of Lemberg had balanced the victories of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, and the rulers of Germany, their armies at a standstill, their territories blockaded, their sea-borne commerce arrested, must prepare for a prolonged struggle against a combination of States of at least twice their population and wealth, commanding through sea power the resources of the whole world and possessed at this juncture of the choice where to strike the next blow.

* * * * *

The Truths of War are absolute, but the principles governing their application have to be deduced on each occasion from the circumstances, which are always different ; and in consequence no rules are any guide to action. Study of the past is invaluable as a means of training and storing the mind, but it is no help without selective discernment of the particular facts and of their emphasis, relation and proportion.

German, like British military policy, oscillated throughout the Great War between two opposed conceptions of strategy. Reduced to the simplest terms the contrasted theories may be expressed as follows : To attack the strong, or to attack the weak. Once all attempts against the Dardanelles were finally excluded from consideration, little was left to Britain but to attack the strong. The Balkans were lost, and the scale of the armies required to produce decisive results in the Balkan Peninsula or in Turkey had by this time outrun the limits of available sea power. The prizes had disappeared or dwindled ; the efforts required to gain them had been multiplied beyond all reason. But to Germany, with her central position and excellent railway system, both alternative policies were constantly open, and her leaders, in their torment of perplexity, were drawn now in one direction and now in the other.

To contend that either of these theories was wholly and invariably right and the other wrong would be to press argument beyond the bounds of common sense. Obviously if you can beat your strongest opponent in the hostile combination you should do so. But if you cannot beat your

strongest opponent in the main theatre, nor he beat you; or if it is very unlikely that you can do so, and if the cost of failure will be very great, then surely it is time to consider whether the downfall of your strongest foe cannot be accomplished through the ruin of his weakest ally, or one of his weaker allies; and in this connection a host of political, economic and geographical advantages may arise and play their part in the argument. Every case must be judged upon its merits and in relation to the whole of the circumstances of the occasion. The issue is not one for rigid or absolute decision in general terms; but a strong inclination in theory, based upon profound reflection, is a good guide amid the conflict and confusion of facts.

Falkenhayn's
Achievement
in 1915.

These volumes will leave the reader in no doubt about the opinion of their author. From first to last it is contended that once the main armies were in deadlock in France the true strategy for both sides was to attack the weaker partners in the opposite combination with the utmost speed and ample force. According to this view, Germany was unwise to attack France in August, 1914, and especially unwise to invade Belgium for that purpose. She should instead have struck down Russia and left France to break her teeth against the German fortress and trench lines. Acting thus she would probably have avoided war with the British Empire, at any rate during the opening, and for her most important, phase of the struggle. The first German decision to attack the strongest led to her defeat at the Marne and the Yser, and left her baffled and arrested with the ever-growing might of an implacable British Empire on her hands. Thus 1914 ended.

But in 1915 Germany turned to the second alternative, and her decision was attended by great success. Leaving the British and French to shatter their armies against her trench lines in France, Germany marched and led her allies against Russia, with the result that by the autumn enormous territories had been conquered from Russia; all the Russian system of fortresses and strategic railways was in German hands, while the Russian armies were to a

The Re-
jected
Remedy of
the Allies.

large extent destroyed and the Russian State grievously injured.

The only method by which the Allies could rescue Russia was by forcing the Dardanelles. This was the only counter-stroke that could be effective. If it had succeeded it would have established direct and permanent contact between Russia and her Western allies, it would have driven Turkey, or at the least Turkey in Europe, out of the war, and might well have united the whole of the Balkan States, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Roumania, against Austria and Germany. Russia would thus have received direct succour, and in addition would have experienced an enormous relief through the pressure which the combined Balkan States would instantly have applied to Austria-Hungary. However, the narrow and local views of British Admirals and Generals and of the French Headquarters had obstructed this indispensable manœuvre. Instead of a clear strategic conception being clothed and armed with all that the science of staffs and the authority of Commanders could suggest, it had been resisted, hampered, starved and left to languish. The time gained by this mismanagement and the situation created by the Russian defeats enabled Germany in September to carry the policy of attacking the weaker a step further. Falkenhayn organized an attack upon Serbia. Bulgaria was gained to the German side, Serbia was conquered, and direct contact was established between the Central Empires and Turkey. The failure and final abandonment of the Dardanelles campaign thus sealed the fate not only of the Balkan States but also of Russia. The defeat of the French and British armies in the disastrous battles of Champagne and Loos proved the German front unbreakable in the West. The direct contact between Germany and Turkey established through the accession of Bulgaria gripped Turkey and threw open the road to the East. The year 1915 was therefore one of great success for Germany, and Falkenhayn could claim with justice that by the mistakes of her enemies and by her own adoption of the policy of attacking the weaker she had retrieved in its course the disastrous situation in which she had been left at the end of 1914.

Opportunity and initiative had returned to Germany: the next move lay with her, and 1916 dawned in breathless expectation of what it would be.

The Initiative returns to Germany.

* * * * *

Nowhere was the choice of Germany awaited with more strained attention than in Roumania. The policy of a small State overshadowed by tremendous neighbouring Empires, at grips with one another, from both of whom she coveted important provinces, was necessarily one of calculation. In the years before the war Roumania conceived herself to have been defrauded of Bessarabia by Russia after the Russo-Turkish War of 1878. From Hungary her desires were at once natural and ambitious. Siebenburgen, Transylvania and to a lesser extent the Bukovina were largely inhabited by men of Roumanian race, and in Transylvania particularly Roumanian sentiment was sternly repressed by the Hungarian Government. To be united to these unredeemed provinces, to join her outlying kinsfolk to the Motherland, to build in one form or another the integral, ethnological unit of a Great Roumania, was throughout the supreme and dominating motive at Bucharest. These aims had for generations been obvious both to Russia and to Austria-Hungary, who watched without illusion and fully armed every move in Roumanian affairs. On her other borders Roumania clashed with two Balkan States. She competed with Serbian ambitions for the eventual reversion of the Banat of Temesvar. She had profited by the crisis of the Balkan War of 1912 to take the Dobruja from Bulgaria. To her grave preoccupations about Russia and Austria-Hungary, Roumania must henceforward add a persisting fear of Bulgarian revenge.

These grim external relationships were aggravated by the complications of domestic and dynastic politics. The Roumanian Conservatives, headed by Majoresco, favoured Germany. The Liberals, headed by Bratiano, the new Prime Minister, favoured France. Outside official circles the most prominent politician on the side of the Entente was Take Jonescu, and on the side of Germany Carp. The King was not only pro-German but German, and a faithful son of the House of Hohenzollern to boot. The Heir

Apparent was pro-French and his wife pro-English. Both the King and his successor had exceptional consorts. The poetry of 'Carmen Sylva' is widely acclaimed; the courage of Queen Marie was to remain undaunted through every trial the tempest had in store. In short, Roumania, if war came, could move in either direction towards alternative prizes glittering across chasms, and in either case she would find a Party and a Royal Family apt and happy to execute her policy. To choose would be an awful hazard. Yet not to choose, to linger in futile neutrality, might cast away the supreme opportunity of Roumanian national history.

A minor complication upon the threshold of action was a Treaty signed in 1883 between Roumania and Austria-Hungary, to which Germany and Italy had subsequently acceded. By this the two parties engaged to follow a friendly policy, to give mutual support and not enter into any alliance or engagement directed against the other party. If Roumania without provocation on her part were attacked, Austria-Hungary was bound to bring her in ample time help and assistance. If Austria-Hungary were attacked in the same circumstances in a portion of her State bordering on Roumania, Roumania was reciprocally bound to come to her aid.

This Treaty had been kept strictly secret, and up to the outbreak of war was known in Roumania only to the King and to the Prime Minister. But Russia had deep suspicions that something of the sort existed, and in her railway strategy at least counted Roumania as a potential foe. In 1913 the Treaty, though it still stood, had become extremely precarious, and Count Czernin, the future Austro-Hungarian Foreign Secretary and at that time Austrian Minister to Bucharest, was charged specially with the duty of ascertaining from King Carol what reliance could be placed upon the compact. He achieved his object by suggesting to the King that the Alliance should be ratified by the Parliaments at Vienna, Budapest and Bucharest. This test was conclusive. 'The alarm evinced by the King,' writes Czernin, 'at the suggestion—at the very idea that the carefully guarded secret of the existence of an alliance should be divulged, proved

to me how totally impossible it would be in the circumstances to infuse fresh life into such dead matter.'

Roumania
at the Out-
break of
War.

Swiftly upon this came the bombs of Serajevo. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand was friendly to Roumania and adverse to the Magyar domination of Hungary. He was believed to favour a scheme of forming a Great Roumania at the expense of Hungary, and incorporating the whole unit in a tripartite Empire under a Triple instead of a Dual Monarchy. His murder therefore aroused in Roumania not only personal sympathy but national disappointment. At the same time his disappearance removed one of the ties which connected Roumania with the Teutonic Powers. It was left for the Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia to sever the others.

Almost at the same hour when Sir Edward Grey was reading the brutal terms of this document to the British Cabinet in Downing Street, Count Czernin was repeating them to King Carol in Bucharest. 'Never shall I forget,' writes Czernin, 'the impression it made on the old King when he heard it. He, wise old politician that he was, recognized at once the immeasurable possibilities of such a step, and before I finished reading the document he interrupted me, exclaiming "It will be a world war." It was long before he could collect himself. . . .'¹

Czernin continues: 'The Ultimatum and the danger of war . . . completely altered the Roumanian attitude, and it was suddenly recognized that Roumania could achieve her object by other means, not by peace but by war—not with, but against the [Austro-Hungarian] Monarchy. I would never have believed it possible that such a rapid and total change could have occurred practically within a few hours. Genuine and unsimulated indignation at the tone of the Ultimatum was the order of the day, and the universal conclusion arrived at was "Austria has gone mad. . . ." Like a rock standing in the angry sea of hatred, poor old King Carol was alone with his German sympathies.'

Upon the complicated politics of aspiring Roumania the Great War had thus supervened. Russia and Austria-Hungary sprang at each other in mortal conflict, while

¹ *In the World War*: Count Ottokar Czernin.

high above the European scene rose the flaming sword of Germany. Each side bid for Roumania's favours and offered bribes for Roumanian intervention. But the inducements of the Great Powers took the form, not of ceding portions of their own territory to Roumanian sovereignty, but rather of promising to cede portions of their rivals' territory to Roumania if with her assistance they won the war. The question which Roumania had to decide was, Who would win the War? It was very difficult to tell, yet on judging rightly depended Ruin or Empire. Long did Roumania hesitate before she gave her answer.

There was no doubt where at the outset her sympathies lay. Roumania saw like all neutral states, like all detached observers, how flagrantly the Central Powers had put themselves in the wrong and how grossly they had blundered. On the balance far more was to be gained by Roumania from the downfall of Austria-Hungary than from that of Russia. The Pro-French Bratiano ministry was in power. Take Ionescu, like Venizelos in Greece, never swerved from the conviction that England would always come out victorious. Sympathies, merits, interest, mood, all pointed towards Britain, France and Russia. On the other side was King Carol with the Treaty on his conscience—and the fear of national destruction at his heart.

Prudence enjoined delay, and in this atmosphere any proposal of honouring the alliance and joining Austria was out of the question. The Roumanian Government followed the Italian example of declaring that as there had not been an unprovoked attack upon Austria the *casus fœderis* had not arisen. Roumania declared neutrality, and King Carol had to be content with this. The policy of Roumania henceforward is sourly described by Czernin in the following terms, which cannot be considered just unless her difficulties are also comprehended: 'The Roumanian Government consciously and deliberately placed itself between the two groups of Powers and allowed itself to be driven and pushed by each, got the largest amount of advantages from each, and watched for the moment when it could be seen which was the stronger, in order then to fall upon the weaker.'

While the old King lived his influence was sufficient,

in spite of the Battle of Lemberg and the Russian advance into Galicia, to prevent Roumania from declaring war upon Austria-Hungary. But on October 10, 1914, King Carol died. By this time it was evident that the war would be long, and its result was more than ever to Roumanian eyes incalculable. In the spring of 1915 the Germans began to shatter the Russian front, and the immense disasters and recoil of the Russian armies dominated the Roumanian mood and paralysed the disconnected British, French and Russian diplomacy. On the other hand, the attack upon the Dardanelles, the prospect of the fall of Constantinople and of the arrival of a British Fleet in the Black Sea was a counterpoise. All through 1915, while the Russian retreat was continual, the expectation of a British and French victory over Turkey kept Roumania true to her convictions and neutral in the war. She accepted money from both sides, she sold corn and oil to Germany, but she obstructed the passage of German munitions to the Dardanelles and closed no gate decisively upon the Allies. With the failure of the Dardanelles Expedition, with the accession of Bulgaria to the Teutonic cause, with the invasion and ruin of Serbia and the final evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula, all the military factors became adverse, and Roumania at the beginning of 1916 stood isolated and encompassed by the Central Empires.

Her Isolation at Christmas.

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There was however one factor of which Roumania took notice. An allied army based on Salonica faced the Bulgarians along their Southern frontier. We have seen in the second volume the curious beginnings of this enterprise, and, so far as they are worth recording, the still more curious causes which led its being entrusted to the command of General Sarrail.

Sarrail had arrived at Salonica in September, 1915, to find one British and two French divisions in or near the town. The Serbians were retreating in all the cruel severity of the winter before the German-Austro-Bulgarian invasion. Some small French detachments were sent northward up the Vardar valley; but of course it was already too late for Sarrail or the Allied Powers to give any effective help.

The
Salonica
Expedition.

Sarrail had neither the force nor the communications to enable him to act effectively. As the British General Staff had explained carefully to their Government in October, no sufficient force could be spared, or if spared, landed in Salonica in time, or if landed at Salonica, transported and maintained in Serbia. The roads and railways, the wagons and rolling stock which existed could not carry to the north any army large enough seriously to intervene in the tragedy of the Serbian overthrow. At the same time the attitude of King Constantine had become so openly pro-German that there was an obvious danger of Salonica being converted into a hostile town *behind* the French advanced detachments which were based upon it. In these circumstances, Sarrail had recalled his troops hastily to the town of Salonica, determined to keep a hold at any rate on his base: and the remnant of the Serbian Army managed in the end to make its escape to the shores of the Adriatic, whence French and Italian warships embarked the indomitable survivors and brought them round to Salonica by sea. Here then in November, 1915, had ended the first futile phase of the Salonica expedition.

But this as it had turned out was only to be the beginning of the story. Although Serbia was conquered, the remnants of her army rescued, Bulgaria committed to the side of the Central Powers, and although the effectual co-operation of Greece had become hopeless, the Salonica policy was to continue. At the beginning of 1915 both Lloyd George and Briand had had the same idea of sending a large army to Salonica to influence the Balkans. They had not then had the power to execute their plan while it had great prizes to offer; but when almost all the possible advantages had disappeared these two brilliant men, akin in many ways in temperament, found themselves advancing to controlling positions. They both adhered faithfully to their first conception, and neither seemed to realize how vastly its prospects had been curtailed. Such was their influence upon events that a numerous allied army was, at enormous cost, in defiance of military opinion, and after most of the original political objectives had disappeared, carried or being carried to Salonica. At the outset the oppositions to develop-

ing the Salonica expedition on a far larger scale seemed overwhelming ; the majority of the British Government was against the plan ; the General Staff were violently adverse ; Lord Kitchener threatened several times to resign if it was pressed. Against this combination was Lloyd George. Similar conditions existed on the other side of the Channel ; Joffre and the French Grand Quartier Général were adverse to the proposed diversion of forces from the main theatre. Clémenceau was violently hostile, but Briand, adroit, persuasive, and now Prime Minister, had many resources. Joffre's position had been weakened by his defeat in Champagne, and an accommodation was effected between him and the French Cabinet, of which the salient features were that Joffre should have the Salonica army as well as the armies in France under his general command, and that in return Joffre should whole-heartedly support the Salonica project in the councils of the Allies and also with the resources at his disposal. France thus united then threw her whole weight upon the British Cabinet and finally, aided by Lloyd George, induced their compliance.

The
Influence of
Lloyd
George and
Briand.

The controversies which raged on both sides of the Channel upon the Salonica expedition were silenced by the remarkable fact that it was upon this much abused front that the final collapse of the central Empires first began. The falling away of Bulgaria, the weakest Ally, produced reactions in Germany as demoralizing as the heaviest blows they had sustained upon the western front. The Salonica policy, for all its burden upon our shipping and resources, its diversion of troops, its false beacon to Roumania, and its futile operations, was nevertheless largely vindicated by the extremely practical test of results. The consternation of Bulgaria at the defeats of the German armies in France was however at least as potent a factor in her collapse as the actual military pressures to which her own troops were subjected. The reactions were reciprocal: the German defeats undermined Bulgarian resistance ; and the Bulgarian surrender pulled out the linchpin of the German combination.

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True strategy in 1915 pointed for the Allies to the south-

Still not
too late.

eastern theatre, to the Balkan States, to Constantinople, to the weaker members of the hostile confederacy ; and though everything was done at the wrong time, in the wrong way, and at the wrong place, nevertheless the general direction of the pressure was right, and in the long run produced results. There was however one way in which the true strategic direction could have been armed with tactical force.

It must have been a hard thing for William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings to call his proud Normans off from the attack, and by feigning a flight down the Hill of Senlac to induce Harold and his army to quit the stockades they had so stubbornly defended. William was not however found unequal to that test, and has in consequence been called the 'Conqueror' ever since.

Following this suggestion, the reader will no doubt perceive that the plan of British and Allied war which according to this account would best have served our interests in the year 1916 would have been a surprise attack upon the Dardanelles. Such an operation, if successful, would have been the only parry to a possible German eastward thrust, and the only means of holding Russia and preventing Roumania from being absorbed in the Teutonic combination. In face of the actual German plans for a great offensive at Verdun, for the withdrawal of all German troops from the Austrian Front, and an Austrian offensive in the Trentino, the forcing of the Dardanelles by Allied fleets and armies might well have been decisive. If this could have been accomplished by the month of June, Roumania might have been persuaded to march against the Central Powers simultaneously with the Russian offensive under Brusiloff ; and in this event there can be no doubt that the whole Austrian Front towards the east would have been completely swept away. Moreover, the concentration of such large numbers of allied troops already in existence in the eastern Mediterranean, at Salonica, in Egypt and the Islands, and the immense quantities of shipping and small craft of all kinds which were already on the spot, would have rendered a general descent upon the Gallipoli Peninsula, on the Asiatic shore or at Dedeagatch-Bulair, a thoroughly feasible scheme.

A single mental conception would have transformed all the twenty allied divisions, sprawled in defensive or diverse functions, into a vast army crouching, under the cover of perfectly satisfactory explanations, for one swift convergent spring. Assuredly the enemy—Turks and Allies—were absolutely convinced that, dreading the fire that had burned us, we would never molest the Dardanelles again. Within two months of our evacuation they had withdrawn all their troops from the Gallipoli Peninsula except three divisions, and had distributed them in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Thrace. The Turkish Army that had so stoutly defended the Peninsula was scattered to every point of the compass, and separated from that fateful spot by long, uncertain, and inefficient railway and road communications. The British Army that might attack the deserted Peninsula lay within thirty-six hours' steaming of whatever landing places might be selected. The Navy was thoroughly equipped for the task. Not only did we know—to our cost maybe, but also to our experience—every inch of the ground and every yard of the coast, but a situation as favourable as was open in March or April, 1915, had returned. The enemy was once again off his guard, and the choice of time and place had, in this theatre at least, returned to our hands. The very barriers of inhibition that existed in the minds of the British Cabinet, and of which the enemy was clearly conscious, were the prime reason for the attempt. The more morally impossible a military operation, the better chance it will have of success if it is physically practicable. Surprise—that sovereign talisman of War—springs from the doing of the exact thing the enemy is certain will never be tried. 'Whatever happens, they will never do that again. Put yourself in their place—would you?' 'No, it is inconceivable.' Do it then—if this is the enemy's thought—and do it for that very reason. However, no such audacious scheme crossed the minds of our rulers. They trusted they might never hear the name of Gallipoli again, and yielded themselves with placid hopefulness to the immense frontal attacks which were being prepared in France. It was not until the summer

Power of
the Unex-
pected.

Falkenhayn's
Memorandum.

of 1918 that Admiral Keyes—strong in the achievement of Zeebrugge—and Admiral Wemyss installed as First Sea Lord, were able to obtain the authority for a renewed naval forcing of the Dardanelles in the possible campaign of 1919. That was at last too late.

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Long and anxious were the reflections of the German High Command. They have been elaborately explained by the person chiefly responsible. During Christmas, 1915, Falkenhayn set himself to write a Memorandum for the eye of the Emperor. He has published it in his Memoirs. The document is not an impressive one and it bears evidence of being dressed to the taste of Falkenhayn's august master, but its argument and its conclusion were certainly clear. Falkenhayn deprecated but did not seek to veto the Austrian proposal for an attack on Italy. He disapproved of attacks on England in the East: 'Victories at Salonica, the Suez Canal or in Mesopotamia can only help us in so far as they intensify the doubts about England's invulnerability which have already been aroused amongst the Mediterranean peoples and in the Mohammedan world. . . . We can in no case expect to do anything of decisive effect in the course of the war, as the advocates of an Alexander march to India or Egypt or an overwhelming blow at Salonica are always hoping. . . .' He rejected plans for continuing the offensive against Russia: 'According to all reports the domestic difficulties of the "Giant Empire" are multiplying rapidly. Even if we cannot perhaps expect a revolution in the grand style, we are entitled to believe that Russia's internal troubles will compel her to give in within a relatively short period. . . . Unless we are again prepared to put a strain on the troops which is altogether out of proportion—and this is prohibited by the state of our reserves—an offensive with a view to a decision in the East is out of the question for us until April, owing to the weather and the state of the ground. *The rich territory of the Ukraine is the only objective that can be considered.*¹ The communications towards that region are in no way

¹ My italics.

sufficient. It is to be presumed that we should either secure the adhesion of Roumania or make up our minds to fight her: both are impracticable for the moment. A thrust at Petersburg, with its million inhabitants, whom we should have to feed from our own short stocks if the operations were successful, does not promise a decision. An advance on Moscow takes us nowhere. We have not the forces available for any of these undertakings. For all these reasons Russia as an object of our offensive must be considered as excluded.' . . . Falkenhayn then proceeds to examine the Western theatre. 'In Flanders, as far as the Lorette Ridge, the state of the ground prevents any far-reaching operation until the middle of the spring. South of that point the local Commanders consider that about thirty divisions would be required. The offensive in the northern sector would need the same number. Yet it is impossible for us to concentrate those forces on one point of our front. . . . Moreover, the lessons to be deduced from the failure of our enemies' mass attacks are decisive against any imitation of their battle methods. An attempt at a mass break-through, even with an extreme accumulation of men and material, cannot be regarded as holding out prospects of success against a well-armed enemy whose morale is sound and who is not seriously inferior in number. The defender has usually succeeded in closing the gap. This is easy enough for him if he decides to withdraw voluntarily, and it is hardly possible to stop him doing so. The salients thus made, enormously exposed to the effect of flank fire, threaten to become a mere slaughter-house. The technical difficulties of directing and supplying the masses bottled up in them are so great as to seem practically insurmountable.

'We must equally discountenance any attempt to attack a British sector with comparatively inadequate means. We could only approve that course if we could give such an attack an objective within reasonable reach. There is no such objective; our goal would have to be nothing less than to drive the English completely from the Continent and force the French behind the Somme. If that object at least were not attained the attack would have been purposeless. . . .'

East or
West?

His
Decision.

Having disposed of all these alternatives the General approaches the conclusion to which his reflections had led him: 'There remains only France. . . . The strain in France has almost reached breaking-point. . . . The uncertain method of a mass break-through, in any case beyond our means, is unnecessary. Within our reach, behind the French sector of the Western Front, there are objectives for the retention of which the French General Staff would be compelled to throw in every man they have. If they do so, the forces of France will bleed to death—as there can be no question of a voluntary withdrawal—whether we reach our goal or not. If they do not do so, and we reach our objective, the moral effect on France will be enormous. For an operation limited to a narrow front, Germany will not be compelled to spend herself so completely, for all other fronts are practically drained. She can face with confidence the relief attacks to be expected on those fronts, and indeed hope to have sufficient troops in hand to reply to them with counter-attacks, for she is perfectly free to accelerate or draw out her offensive, to intensify or break it off from time to time as suits her purpose.

'The objectives of which I am speaking now are Belfort and Verdun. The considerations urged above apply to both; yet the preference must be given to Verdun. The French lines at that point are barely 12 miles distant from the German railway communication. Verdun is therefore the most powerful *point d'appui* for an attempt [by the French¹] with a relatively small expenditure of effort to make the whole German front in France and Belgium untenable. At Christmas,' says Falkenhayn, 'it was decided to give effect to the views which had crystallized out of this process of reasoning.'

The execution of Falkenhayn's new policy required an almost complete relaxation of the pressure upon Russia. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were informed that no great enterprises against Russia could be set on foot in 1916, and that they could expect no reinforcements. All the German troops were withdrawn in the south from the Galician Front, and this theatre, so pregnant at once with

¹ W. S. C.

menace and advantage, was confided entirely to Austrian hands. At the same time the Austrians were not dissuaded from preparing and developing an offensive against Italy in the Trentino, for which purpose they also withdrew a number of their best troops from their Eastern Front. And thus both north and south the Central Powers turned away from the eastern frontiers and their momentous problems, and leaving Russia to recover behind them and Roumania to brood over the scene with anxious eyes, plunged into desperate adventures in the West.

Examina-
tion of his
Policy.

This was indeed a momentous decision. It involved the complete reversal of the policy by which General von Falkenhayn had in 1915 restored the German situation. Instead of pursuing his advantages against the weaker antagonists, he selected for the great German effort of 1916 the strongest enemy at that enemy's strongest point. That the decision was disastrous has been proved by the event. But it may be contended also that it was wrong. It was based first of all upon an erroneous appreciation of the offensive and defensive conditions on the great battle-fronts in France, and upon the mistaken belief that the general war could be brought to an end in 1916 by some strong effort there by one side or the other. Secondly, it took altogether too narrow and too purely military a view of the general position of Germany and her allies.

The vital need for Germany was to break the blockade. Unless she could secure to herself resources far greater than could be found within the frontiers of the quadruple Alliance, the long war, to which the world was now condemned, must end inevitably in her exhaustion and defeat. She had no chance of breaking the blockade at sea. Its efficiency might be impaired by the devices of neutrals, but the vast process of starvation not only in food but in materials indispensable to modern armies was remorselessly and unceasingly at work. The British Fleet towered up in massive strength, and no one seriously doubted what the result of a fought-out battle on blue water would be. Sea Power and Land Power were arrayed against each other, and if Germany could not conquer Britain on the seas, where could she turn? Only in one direction lay

The need
to win
Roumania.

salvation. If she could not break the blockade by sea, she must break it by land. If the oceans were closed, Asia was open. If the West was barred with triple steel, the East lay bare. Only in the East and South-East and in Asia could Germany find the feeding grounds and breathing room—nay, the man power—without which her military strength however impressive was but a wasting security. Only in spreading their frontiers over new enormous regions could the Central Empires make themselves a self-contained and self-sufficing organism, and only by becoming such an organism could they deprive their enemies of the supreme and deadly weapon—Time.

The true and indeed the only attainable political objectives open to Germany in 1916 were the final overthrow of Russia and the winning of Roumania to the side of the Central Empires. These were harmonious aims. Success in the first would go far to achieve the second. Roumania was essential to Germany. 'As I now saw quite clearly,' writes Ludendorff of the situation in October, 1916, 'we should not have been able to exist, much less carry on the war, without Roumania's corn and oil. . . .' But if the battered corpse of an invaded and conquered Roumania was thus indispensable at the end of the year, how much more precious would have been Roumania with her resources and her armies as an Ally at the beginning. During 1915 a German convention with Roumania had secured to the Teutonic Powers the vital corn and oil supplies. But Germany in January, 1916, might reasonably look for a far more favourable development. Bulgaria had joined the Central Powers. The Dardanelles were safely shut. Russia was reeling. Roumania was therefore already almost surrounded, and any further collapse of Russia would isolate her completely. If she coveted Transylvania from Hungary, did she not also claim Bessarabia from Russia? A sagacious German policy at this juncture could have offered to Roumania in combination every inducement to join her neighbours, from high rewards to extreme duress.

Following upon this it would appear that the true strategic objectives of Germany in 1916 were the Black Sea and the Caspian. These lay within her grasp and required no

effort beyond her strength. A continued advance against the south lands of Russia into the Ukraine and towards Odessa would have secured at comparatively little cost sufficient food for the Teutonic peoples. An upward thrust of Turkish armies sustained by German troops and organized by German generals would have conquered the Caucasus. Fleets and flotillas improvised by German science could easily dominate both the inland seas. The command of these waters would threaten simultaneously every point along their 5,000 miles of coast line, absorbing in negative defence ten Russians for every German employed, and multiplying in an almost unlimited degree the opportunities for further advance. Roumania completely encircled, cut from French and British aid by Bulgaria and Turkey, cut from the Russian armies by an Austro-German march from Lemberg to Odessa, could have had no choice but to join the Central Empires. The skilful employment of fifteen or twenty German divisions animating Austrian and Turkish armies would surely and easily have extended the territories which nourished Germany so as to include by the end of the summer of 1916 the whole of South-Eastern Europe, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian. The Austro-German Front against Russia might have stretched from Riga to Astrakhan, with little more expenditure of force than was required to hold the existing Eastern line. At every moment and at every stage in these vast combinations the pressure upon Russia and upon her failing armies would have increased: and at every stage her troops and those of her allies would have been dissipated in vain attempts to wall in the ever-spreading flood in the East, or would have been mown down in frantic assaults upon the German trenches in France.

Breaking
the Blockade
by Land.

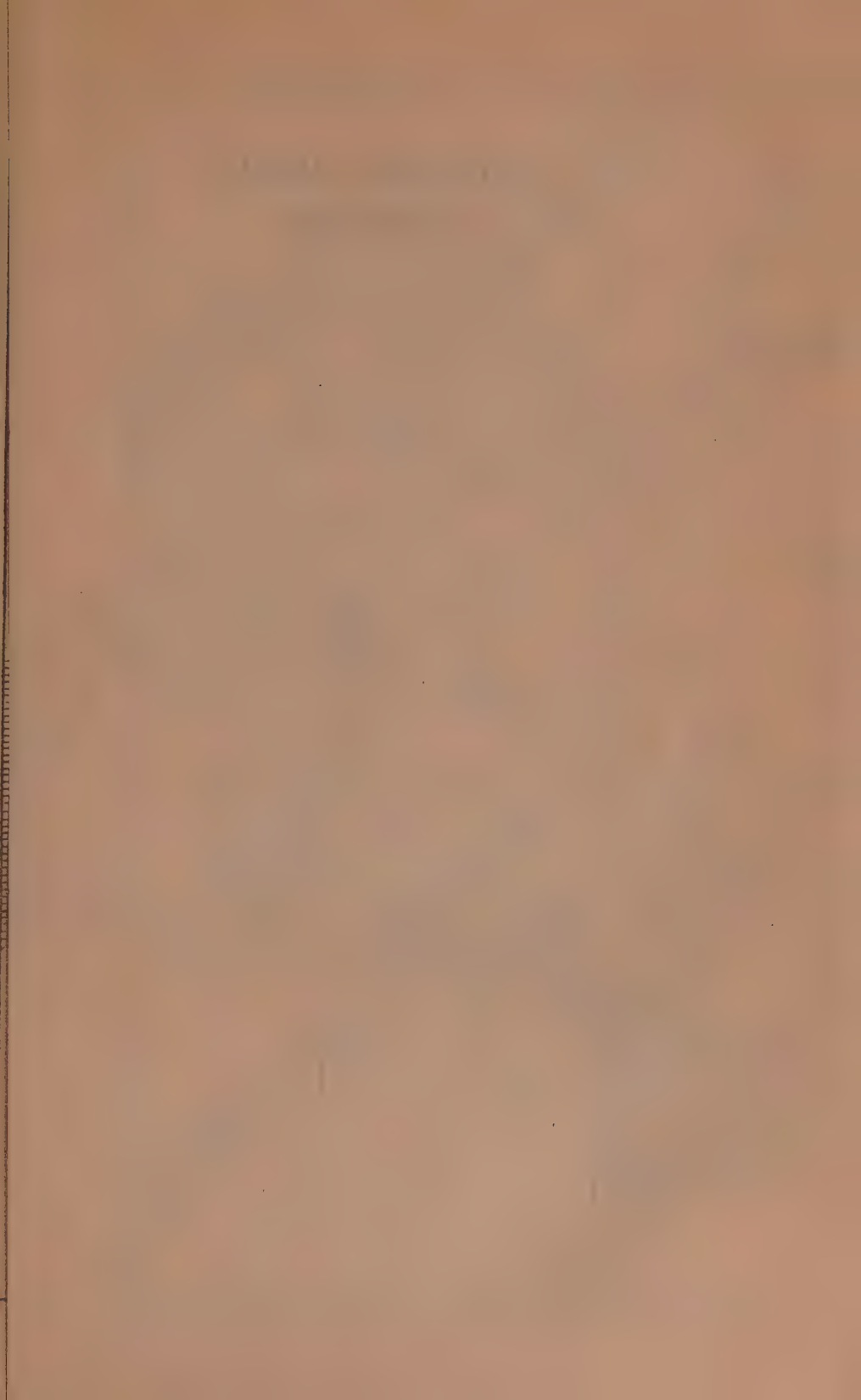
And this was itself only a stage in the process of land expansion and strategic menace open to the German military power. From the Caspian once navally commanded, Persia was a cheap and easy prey. There was no need to march large armies like Alexander to the East. Literally a few thousand Germans could have dominated Northern Persia, and eastward still beyond Persia lay Afghanistan and the threat to India. The consequences of such a German

Roumania
or Verdun.

policy must have paralysed all British war effort from her Indian Empire. In Egypt, in Mesopotamia, and in India whole armies of British and Indian troops would have been forced to stand idle in apprehension of impending invasion or revolt, while the glory of the German eagles and the sense of approaching change swept far and wide through the peoples of Asia.

But from all the prospects so opened out to her in the East Germany was lured away. The final destruction of Russia, the overawing and conversion of Roumania, the conquest of granary after granary and oilfield after oilfield, the indefinite menace to the British Empire in Asia, with consequent diversion and dissipation of British forces, were all renounced by Falkenhayn in a few meagre sentences. Germany was made to concentrate her whole available offensive effort upon the cluster of wooded hills and permanent defences which constituted the strong fortress of Verdun. One-half the effort, one-quarter the sacrifice, lavished vainly in the attack on Verdun would have overcome the difficulty of the defective communications in 'the rich lands of the Ukraine.' The Russian armies in the south would have been routed long before they had gained their surprising victories under Brusiloff; and Roumania, her 500,000 men and her precious supplies of corn and oil, would have been brought into the war early, not late, and as an ally and not as a foe. But the school of formula had vanquished the school of fact, the professional bent of mind had overridden the practical; submission to theory had replaced the quest for reality. Attack the strongest at his strongest point, not the weakest at his weakest point, was once again proclaimed the guiding maxim of German military policy.

From the moment when he received the news of the total evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula, the opportunity of General von Falkenhayn, Chief of the German General Staff, was to pronounce the word *ROUMANIA*. He pronounced instead the word *VERDUN*.



CHAPTER IV

VERDUN

The Dismantled Forts—Fact and Sentiment—The Anvil—Falkenhayn's Tactical Conception—The Attitude and Responsibility of the Crown Prince—Colonel Driant, Deputy for Nancy—Galliéni and Joffre—Castelnau's Mission—The Battle begins—The composure of General Joffre—Activities of Castelnau and Pétain—The Struggle prolonged—Falkenhayn entangled—Cost of a Rigid Defence—Galliéni's last Act—'Unity of front'—Genesis of the Somme Plan—Reaction of Verdun on the Somme—The Revival of Russia—The Fatal Defect—Brusiloff's Offensive—Surprise—Consequences—The Price of Verdun.

THE drama of Verdun may perhaps be opened by the visit to the fortress in July, 1915, of a delegation from one of the Army Commissions of the Chamber. The deputies had been disquieted by the rumours they had heard of the insecurity of the region before which lay the army of the German Crown Prince. The delegation were received by General Dubail, commanding the group of armies of the East, and by the Governor of Verdun, General Coutanceau. General Dubail explained that after the experiences of Liège and Namur permanent forts were no longer useful. They could be destroyed with certainty by heavy howitzers and were mere shell traps for their garrisons. The only effective defence of Verdun lay in field troops holding an extended line around the fortress. Following these ideas, for which there was much to say, the forts had been dismantled and their coveted guns, garrisons and stores dispersed among the armies. The Governor, General Coutanceau, had the temerity to express a different opinion. He considered that the forts still had a high value and should play an important part in conjunction with the field defences. General Dubail was so irritated at this intervention of his subordinate and rebuked him in

The Dismantled Forts.

Fact and
Sentiment.

terms of such severity, that the Commission on their return to Paris thought it necessary to appeal to the Minister of War to shield the outspoken Governor from punishment and disgrace. In fact however, after an interval of a few weeks General Coutanceau was removed from the Governorship of Verdun, and his place was taken by General Herr. At the beginning of February, 1916, on the very eve of the attack, the army of which the Verdun troops formed a part was transferred from the command of General Dubail to the centre group under General de Langle de Cary. Thus the responsibility for the neglect to develop to the full the defences of this area was divided and difficult to trace.

* * * * *

In a military sense, Verdun had no exceptional importance either to the French or to the Germans. Its forts were disarmed ; it contained no substantial magazines ; it guarded no significant strategic point. It was two hundred and twenty kilometres from Paris, and its capture would not have made any material difference to the safety either of the capital or of the general line. Falkenhayn and Ludendorff both speak of it as a dangerous sally-port against their main railway communications, scarcely twelve miles away. But seeing that only two inferior lines of railway served Verdun, while the German occupied area in its front was fed by no less than fifteen, it should have been easy for the Germans to provide against such a sally. At its highest, the capture of Verdun would have been a military convenience to the Germans, and in a lesser degree an inconvenience to the French.

But then there was the sentiment which attached to Verdun. 'It was,' says a French historian,¹ 'the great fortress proudly confronting its rival Metz, whose name had for centuries not ceased to haunt Germanic imaginations ; it was the great advanced citadel of France ; the principal bastion of her Eastern Frontier, whose fall resounding throughout Europe and the whole world would efface for ever the victories of the Marne and Yser.'

This then was the foundation upon which Falkenhayn's conception of the German attack upon Verdun stood. It was not to be an attempt at a 'break through.' The

¹ Corda : *La Guerre Mondiale*, p. 187.

assailants were not to be drawn into pockets from which they would be fired at from all sides. They were to fire at the French and assault them continually in positions which French pride would make it impossible to yield. The nineteen German divisions and the massed artillery assigned to the task were to wear out and 'bleed white' the French Army. Verdun was to become an anvil upon which French military manhood was to be hammered to death by German cannon. The French were to be fastened to fixed positions by sentiment, and battered to pieces there by artillery. Of course this ingenious plan would be frustrated if the French did not lend themselves to it, and if they did not consider themselves bound to make disproportionate sacrifices to retain the particular hills on which stood the empty forts of Verdun. The Anvil.

It is not intended to press this argument too far. Verdun was a trophy. The German challenge had to be met by the whole resources of the French Army; but ground should have been sacrificed in the conflict as readily as men, with the sole object of exacting the highest price from the enemy at every stage. A greater manœuvring latitude accorded to the defence would have rendered the whole episode far less costly to the French Army, and would have robbed the plan of General von Falkenhayn of such reasons as it could muster. But the German commander, wrong in so much else, had rightly gauged the psychology of the French nation.

Writing in August, 1916, I tried to penetrate and analyse the probable motives which animated the Germans in their attack on Verdun.¹

' Suppose your gap is blasted—what then? Are you going to march to Paris through it? What is to happen, if you break the line of an otherwise unbeaten army? Will you really put your head into the hole?'

' No,' say Main Headquarters; ' we are not so foolish. We are not seeking Verdun. Nor are we seeking to blast a hole. Still less do we intend to march through such a hole. Our aim is quite different. We seek to wear down an army, not to make a gap; to break the heart of a nation, not to break a hole in a line. We have selected Verdun because we think the French will consider themselves bound to

¹ The *London Magazine*, published in November, 1916.

Falken-
hayn's
Tactical
Conception.

defend it at all costs; because we can so dispose our cannon around this apex of their front as to pound and batter the vital positions with superior range and superior metal, and force our enemy to expose division after division upon this anvil to our blows.'

The strategic and psychological conceptions which had led Falkenhayn to select Verdun as the point of the German attack became mingled in the tactical sphere with his impressions derived from the success of the Gorlice-Tarnow attack on Russia in the previous year. There a punch followed by a scoop executed on a moderate front, but backed by a blasting concentration of artillery and gas, had led to a general withdrawal of the Russian line; and the process had been repeated again and again. His plan at Verdun was therefore by this intense punch on a narrow front with high-class troops and unprecedented cannon fire to hammer the French on the anvil of fixed positions, and if successful, to rip their front, as a purely subsidiary development, to the right and left. In pursuance of this idea, he allocated to the Crown Prince nearly 2,000 extra guns, including all the latest types, and masses of shells, but added only four army corps to the forces of the Fifth German Army holding the line. He prescribed the exact frontage and scope of the attack and confined it strictly within the limits possible to these modest forces.

The French trench line ran in a half-moon salient five or six thousand yards around the permanent forts of Verdun.¹ This position was cut in two unequal portions by the Meuse River, at this season nearly a kilometre wide. There were therefore the defences of the left bank (the West or the French left); the defences of the right bank (the East or French centre); and farther east (and to the French right) the plain of the Woeuvre and the fortified eastern heights of the Meuse. It was upon the French centre, between the Meuse and the Woeuvre plain, that the intense punch was to be directed. The German High Command believed that if this centre were pierced to a certain depth, the retreat of the two flanks would ensue automatically, or could easily be procured by further pressure. Their tactical studies of

¹ See Map, p. 93.

the ground before the war had led them to regard the positions of the left bank, unless and until compromised by the retreat of the French centre, as exceptionally strong and forbidding. All these conclusions and decisions were duly imparted to the Crown Prince and the Fifth Army Staff of which General von Knobelsdorf was the chief.

The Attitude
and Respon-
sibility of
the Crown
Prince.

The Crown Prince has been harshly judged in the passion and propaganda of the war. He has been represented at once as a fop and as a tyrant, as a callow youth and as a Moloch ; as an irresponsible passenger and as a commander guilty of gross and disastrous military errors. None of these contradictory alternatives fit the truth. The German Imperial Princes in command of armies or groups of armies were held in strong control. The Headquarters Staff, main and local, decided and regulated everything, and the function of the ill-starred Heir Apparent was largely to bear the odium for their miscalculations and to receive, during the early years of the war, their ceremonious civilities. Even these civilities became attenuated as the long-drawn conflict deepened. Nevertheless, the Crown Prince had influence. He had with the All Highest the access of a son to a father. He had the right to express a view, to pose a question, to require an answer from any General, however august. He also had a share in the Emperor's unique point of view. He was a proprietor. Life, limb and fortune were risked by all the combatants in the Great War, but the inheritance to the Imperial throne, turning so nakedly on the general result, exercised from the first days of the war a sobering and concentrating effect upon a hitherto careless mind. It may also be said that no group of German armies was more consistently successful than his ; and that there is evidence that his personal influence—whatever it may have been—was often thrown into the right side of the scales.

The Crown Prince did not feel comfortable about the attack at Verdun in 1916. He thought that it would be wiser to finish first with Russia in the East. He had of course a long-suppressed eagerness ' to lead his tried and trusty troops once more to battle against the enemy, etc.' But he was disquieted by Falkenhayn's repeated statements

Colonel
Driant,
Deputy for
Nancy.

that the French Army was to be 'bled white' at Verdun, and he felt no conviction that this would only happen to the French. It might even happen to the House of Hohenzollern. Moreover, on the tactical form of the attack his misgivings were supported or perhaps inspired by General von Knobelsdorf and his Staff. Their view was that the attack, if made at all, should be made on a broader front, comprising simultaneously both sides of the Meuse, and that large reserves should be at hand from the outset to exploit the advantages in the initial surprise. The Crown Prince sent Knobelsdorf to lay these claims before Falkenhayn. Falkenhayn insisted on his plan. He had framed it in relation to the whole situation as he saw it and he adhered to the smallest detail. There was to be an anvil. There was to be a punch on a narrow front. There was to be an unparalleled artillery, and only just enough infantry to exploit success. They were to proceed step by step, their way forward being blasted at each stage by cannon. Thus, whether Verdun was taken or not, the French Army would be ruined and the French nation sickened of war. It was a simple solution for world-wide problems, but it was Falkenhayn's solution, and he was in supreme control. By his determination and superior authority Knobelsdorf was soon over-persuaded, and the Crown Prince was thereafter overruled by the military hierarchy in mechanical unanimity. Such are the facts. While the newspapers of the time and in these days many of the histories have dwelt on the vanity and ruthless pride which prompted the heir to the Imperial throne to drive the manhood of Germany ceaselessly into the fires of Verdun, the truth is different. The Crown Prince, shocked and stricken by the butchery and opposed to the operation, continuously endeavoured to use such influence as he commanded to bring it to a close; and we have Ludendorff's testimony to his expressions of relief and pleasure when that decision was finally taken.

* * * * *

The first warning of the unprepared condition of the Verdun defences reached the French Government through an irregular channel. Colonel Driant, Deputy for Nancy, commanded a group of Chasseur battalions in the advanced

lines of Verdun. At the end of November this officer and Member of Parliament came on leave to Paris and requested to be heard by the Army Commission of the Chamber, and on December 1 he exposed to his fellow-deputies the lack of organization and general inadequacy of the defences of the fortress. The Commission confirmed the account given by Colonel Driant, and their report was presented by the Commission to the Minister of War. The vigilant Galliéni was already possessed of similar statements from other quarters, and on December 16 he wrote to General Joffre. From different sources, he said, came accounts of the organization of the front which showed defects in the state of the defences at certain points, particularly and notably in the region of the Meurthe, and of Toul and Verdun. The network of trenches was not complete as it was on the greater part of the front. Such a situation, if it were true, ran the risk of presenting grave embarrassment. A rupture by the enemy in such circumstances would involve not only General Joffre's own responsibility but that of the whole Government. Recent experience of the war proved superabundantly that the first lines could be forced, but that the resistance of second lines could arrest even a successful attack. He asked for an assurance that on all the points of the front the organization at least of two lines should be designed and developed with all the necessary fortifications—barbed wire, inundations, abatis, etc.

Galliéni and
Joffre.

The Commander-in-Chief hastened to reply on December 18 in a letter which holds its place in the records of ruffled officialdom. He asserted in categorical detail that nothing justified the misgivings of the Government. He concluded upon that peculiar professional note of which French military potentates have by no means the monopoly.

‘ But since these apprehensions are founded upon reports which allege defects in the state of the defences, I request you to communicate these reports to me and to specify their authors. I cannot be party to soldiers placed under my command bringing before the Government, by channels other than the hierarchic channel, complaints or protests concerning the execution of my orders. Neither does it become me to defend myself against vague imputations, the source of which I do not know. The mere fact that the

Galliéni and
Joffre.

Government encourages communications of this kind, whether from mobilized Members of Parliament or directly or indirectly from officers serving on the front, is calculated to disturb profoundly the spirit of discipline in the Army. The soldiers who write know that the Government weighs their advice against that of their Chiefs. The authority of these Chiefs is prejudiced. The morale of all suffers from this discredit.

'I could not lend myself to the continuation of this state of things. I require the whole-hearted confidence of the Government. If the Government trusts me, it can neither encourage nor tolerate practices which diminish that moral authority of my office, without which I cannot continue to bear the responsibility.'¹

Evidently Colonel and Deputy Driant in his trenches before Verdun was in danger from more quarters than one.

It is asserted that General Galliéni had no mind to put up with this sort of thing, and that he framed a rejoinder both commanding and abrupt. But colleagues intervened with soothing processes. The Minister for War was marshalling with much assent the heads of a broad indictment of the Grand Quartier Général. He was persuaded to reduce this particular incident to modest proportions. At any rate, in the end he signed a soft reply. Joffre and G.Q.G.

¹ Mais puisque ces craintes sont fondées sur des comptes rendus vous signalant des déféctuosités dans la mise en état de défense, je vous demande de me communiquer ces comptes rendus et de me désigner leurs auteurs.

Je ne puis admettre, en effet, que des militaires placés sous mes ordres fassent parvenir au gouvernement par d'autres voies que la voie hiérarchique des plaintes ou des réclamations au sujet de l'exécution de mes ordres.

Il ne me convient pas davantage de me défendre contre des imputations vagues dont j'ignore la source.

Le seul fait que le gouvernement accueille des communications de ce genre provenant, soit de parlementaires mobilisés, soit directement ou indirectement d'officiers servant sur le front, est de nature à jeter un trouble profond dans l'esprit de discipline de l'armée. Les militaires qui écrivent savent que le gouvernement fait état de leurs correspondances vis-à-vis de leurs chefs. L'autorité de ceux-ci est atteinte ; le moral de tous souffre de ce discrédit.

Je ne saurais me prêter à la continuation de cet état de choses. J'ai besoin de la confiance entière du gouvernement. S'il me l'accorde, il ne peut ni encourager ni tolérer des pratiques qui diminuent l'autorité morale de mon commandement et faute de laquelle je ne pourrai plus continuer à en assumer la responsabilité.

had vindicated their authority. The Ministry for War and the presumptuous and meddling deputies had been put in their places. But there were still the facts to be reckoned with—and the Germans.

Evidence continued to accumulate, and gradually a certain misgiving began to mingle with the assurance of Chantilly. Their own officers sent to examine the Verdun defences threw, in discreet terms, doubts upon the confident assertions with which the Commander-in-Chief had replied to the Minister of War. The troops on the spot and their Commanders were convinced they were soon to be attacked. The defences were still unsatisfactory. The Parliamentary Commissions buzzed incessantly. Finally, on January 20, General de Castelnau, the Major-General of the armies, and General Joffre's virtual Second-in-Command and potential successor, immediately on his return from Salonica, visited Verdun in person. He found much to complain of and gave various directions to remedy the neglects. A regiment of engineers was hurried to the scene; the necessary materials for fortification were provided; communications were improved and work begun. But time was now very short. The German masses were gathering fast. Their enormous magazines swelled each day. Their immense concentration of heavy artillery perfected itself.

Quite early in January the 2nd Bureau (Intelligence) began to indicate Verdun as the point at which a German attack would be delivered. A constant increase of batteries and troops in the regions north of Montfaucon and on both sides of the Meuse, the presence of 'storm' divisions near Hattonchâtel, and the arrival of Austrian heavy howitzers were definitely reported. General Dupont, head of the 2nd Bureau, declared with conviction that Verdun was to be the object of a heavy and immediate attack.

The French Operations Staff, to judge by Pierrefeu's excellent account,¹ seemed to have abandoned their

¹ 'G.Q.G.,' by Jean de Pierrefeu. This officer was employed throughout the war to draft the official communiqués of the French Headquarters. He had the best opportunities of knowing exactly what took place. He is a writer of extraordinary force and distinction.

The Battle
begins.

scepticism slowly. Certainly there seemed many parts of the French line more attractive to a hostile attack. But by the middle of February, those who doubted that a great German offensive was soon to break upon Verdun were few. The majority of the staff were at last convinced that the hour was near and all—so we are told—were eager for the day and confident of its results. No one however had the least idea what the mechanical force of the onslaught would be.

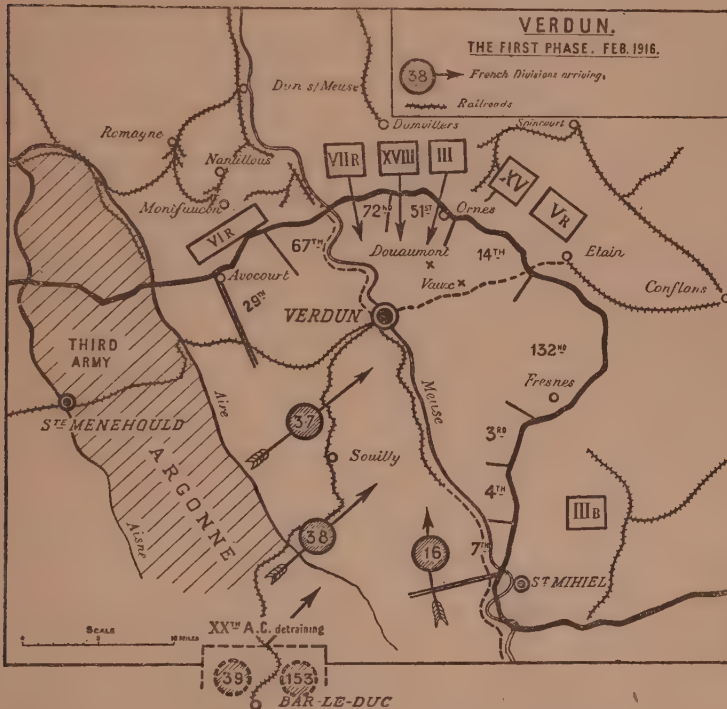
* * * * *

At four o'clock in the morning of February 21 the explosion of a fourteen-inch shell in the Archbishop's Palace at Verdun gave signal of battle, and after a brief but most powerful bombardment three German Army Corps advanced upon the apex of the French front, their right hand on the Meuse. The troops in the forward positions attacked were, except towards the eastern flank, driven backwards towards the fortress line. The battle was continued on the 22nd and the 23rd. The brave Colonel Driant was killed in the woodlands covering the retreat of his Chasseurs. The line was reformed on the ridges near Douaumont: but the German six-inch artillery, dragged forward by tractors, hurled upon the new position so terrific a fire-storm that the French Division chiefly concerned collapsed entirely. During the afternoon of the 24th, both the General commanding the Verdun area and the Commander of the Group of Armies in which it lay (Langle de Cary), telegraphed to Chantilly, advising an immediate withdrawal to the left bank of the Meuse, and the consequent abandonment of the town and fortress of Verdun.

General Joffre was by no means disconcerted by these unexpected and untoward events. He preserved throughout that admirable serenity for which he was noted, which no doubt would have equally distinguished him on the flaming crests of Douaumont. He assented on the 22nd to the movement of the Ist and XXth Corps, and to a request to Sir Douglas Haig to relieve in the line with British troops the Tenth French Army to reinforce Verdun. For the rest he remained in Olympian tranquillity, inspiring by his unaffected calm, regular meals and peaceful slumbers con-

fidence in all about him. A less detached view was necessarily taken by Castelnau. The Second French Army had been relieved in the line some time before by the increasing British forces. This army was in the best order, rested and trained. Its staff had not been affected by the new French rule obliging every Staff Officer to do a spell of duty with the fighting troops. Its Commander, Pétain, had gained already in the war one of the

The Com-
posure of
General
Joffre.



highest reputations. On the evening of February 24, General de Castelnau presented himself to General Joffre and proposed to move the whole of the Second French Army to Verdun. The Commander-in-Chief assented to this. At eleven o'clock on the same night Castelnau, having received further reports of the most serious character, requested by telephone permission to proceed personally to Verdun with plenary powers. Pierrefeu has described the incident which followed. The Commander-in-Chief was already asleep. Following his almost invari-

Activities of
Castelnau
and Pétain.

able custom he had retired to rest at ten o'clock. The orderly officer on duty declared it impossible to disturb him. At first Castelnau submitted. But a few minutes later a further message from Verdun foreshadowing the immediate evacuation of the whole of the right bank of the Meuse arrived, and on this Castelnau would brook no further obstruction. He went in person to the villa Poiret in which the great soldier was reposing. Upon the express order of the Major-General an aide-de-camp took the responsibility of knocking at the formidable double-locked door. The supreme Chief, after perusing the telegrams, gave at once the authorization for General de Castelnau to proceed with full powers, declared there must be no retreat, and then returned to his rest.

Castelnau started forthwith a little after midnight. At Avize, Headquarters of Langle de Cary and the centre group of armies, he quelled the pessimism that existed, and from there telephoned to Verdun announcing his impending arrival and calling upon General Herr 'on the order of the Commander-in-Chief not to yield ground but to defend it step by step,' and warning him that if this order was not executed, 'the consequences would be most grave for him (Herr).' By daylight of the 25th Castelnau reached Verdun and found himself confronted with the tragic scenes of confusion and disorder which haunt the immediate rear of a defeated battle-front. All accounts agree that the influence and authority of Castelnau on the 25th reanimated the defence and for the moment restored the situation. Wherever he went, decision and order followed him. He reiterated the command at all costs to hold the heights of the Meuse and to stop the enemy on the right bank. The XXth and Ist Army Corps now arriving on the scene were thrown into the battle with this intention. While taking these emergency measures, Castelnau had already telegraphed to Pétain ordering him to take command, not only of the Second French Army, which was now moving, but also of all the troops in the fortified region of Verdun.

On the morning of the 26th Pétain received from Castelnau the direction of the battle, which he continued

to conduct, while at the same time mastering the local situation. The neglect of the field and permanent defences of a fortress which it was decided to defend to the death, now bequeathed a cruel legacy to the French troops. In advance of the permanent forts there were neither continuous lines of trenches nor the efficient organization of strong points. Telephone systems and communication trenches were scarce or non-existent. The forts themselves were all empty and dismantled. Even their machine guns and cupolas had been extracted and their flanking batteries disarmed. All these deficiencies had now to be repaired in full conflict and under tremendous fire. Besides the direction of the battle and the organization of his forces and rapidly growing artillery, Pétain took a number of general decisions. Four successive lines of defence were immediately set in hand. In full accord with the views of the much-chastised General Coutanceau, Pétain directed the immediate reoccupation and re-arming of all the forts. To each he assigned a garrison with fourteen days' food and water, and solemn orders never to capitulate. The immense value of the large subterranean galleries of these forts, in which a whole battalion could live in absolute security till the moment of counter-attack, was now to be proved. Lastly, the new commander instituted the marvellous system of motor-lorries between Verdun and Bar le Duc. No less than three thousand of these passed up and down this road every twenty-four hours, and conveyed each week during seven months of conflict an average of 90,000 men and 50,000 tons of material. Along this 'Sacred Way,' as it was rightly called, no less than sixty-six divisions of the French Army were to pass on their journey to the anvil and the furnace fires.

* * * * *

By the end of February the first German onslaught had been stemmed. Large armies were on both sides grappling with each other round the fortress, ever-increasing streams of reinforcements and munitions flowed from all France and Germany towards the conflict, and ever-increasing trains of wounded ebbed swiftly from it. It had become a trial of strength and military honour between Germany and France.

The
Struggle
prolonged.

Falkenhayn
entangled.

Blood was up and heads were down. Vain had it been for Falkenhayn to write at Christmas: Germany will be 'perfectly free to accelerate or draw out her offensive; to intensify or break it off from time to time as suits her purpose.' His own professional and official existence was now engaged. The wine had been drawn and the cup must be drained. The French and German armies continued accordingly to tear each other to pieces with the utmost fury, and the power of the German artillery inflicted grievous losses day by day on the now more numerous French.

When the Germans had attacked on February 21, they had, in accordance with Falkenhayn's plan, used only the three Army Corps of their centre, and three others had stood idle on the two flanks. It can scarcely be doubted that had the whole assaulting forces been thrown in at once, the position of the French, already so critical, could not at the outset have been maintained. However, on March 6 the three flanking Army Corps joined in the battle, and a new series of sanguinary engagements was fought during the whole of March and April for the possession mainly of the hill called 'Le Mort Homme' on the left bank of the Meuse, and for the Côte du Poivre on the right. But the Germans achieved no success comparable to that of their opening. The conditions of the conflict had become more equal. Closely locked and battling in the huge crater-fields and under the same steel storm, German and French infantry fell together by scores of thousands. By the end of April nearly a quarter of a million French and Germans had been killed or wounded in the fatal area, though influencing in no decisive way the balance of the World War.

To the war of slaughter and battles was added that of propaganda and communiqués. In this the French had largely the advantage. They did not cease to proclaim day after day the enormous German losses which attended every assault. As the Germans were obviously storming entrenchments and forts, the world at large was prepared to believe that they must be making sacrifices far greater than those of the French. 'Up till March,' says Ludendorff, 'the impression was that Verdun was a German

victory,' but thereafter opinion changed. Certainly during April and May Allies and neutrals were alike persuaded that Germany had experienced a profound disappointment in her attack on Verdun, and had squandered thereon the flower of her armies.

Cost of a
Rigid
Defence.

I myself shared the common impression that the German losses must be heavier than those of the French. All accounts however showed that the strain upon the French Army was enormous. They were compelled to defend all sorts of positions, good, bad and indifferent, and to fight every inch of the ground with constant counter-attacks under a merciless artillery ; and it was clear that they were conducting the defence in the most profuse manner. ' The French,' I wrote at the time, ' suffered more than the defence need suffer by their valiant and obstinate retention of particular positions. Meeting an artillery attack is like catching a cricket ball. Shock is dissipated by drawing back the hands. A little "give," a little suppleness, and the violence of impact is vastly reduced. Yet, notwithstanding the obstinate ardour and glorious passion for mastery of the French, the German losses at Verdun greatly exceeded theirs.' ¹

It is with surprise which will perhaps be shared by others that I have learned the true facts. During the defensive phase from February to June the French Army suffered at Verdun the loss of no fewer than 179,000 men (apart from officers) killed, missing or prisoners, and 263,000 wounded : a frightful total of 442,000 ; or with officers, probably 460,000. The Germans on the other hand, although the attackers, used their man-power so much less and their artillery so much more that their loss, including officers, did not exceed 72,000 killed, missing and prisoners, and 206,000 wounded : a total of 278,000. From the totals of both sides there should be deducted the usual one-eighth for casualties on other parts of the front where French and Germans faced each other. But this in no way alters the broad fact that the French sacrificed in defending Verdun more than three men to every two attacking Germans. To this extent therefore the tactical and psychological

¹ *London Magazine*. Written in August, published November, 1916.

Galliéni's
Last Act.

conceptions underlying Falkenhayn's scheme were vindicated.

Ever since the opening phase of the struggle of Verdun the personal position of General Joffre had deteriorated. The neglect to prepare the field defences of Verdun, the disarming of its forts, the proved want of information of the Commander-in-Chief and his Headquarters Staff upon this grave matter, the fact that it had been left to the Parliamentary Commission to raise the alarm, the obstinacy with which this alarm had been received and resented, were facts known throughout Government and Opposition circles in Paris. The respective parts played by Joffre and Castelnau in the first intense crisis of the Verdun situation were also widely comprehended. In the whole of this episode little credit could be discovered either for the Commander-in-Chief or for the gigantic organization of the Grand Quartier Général sourly described as 'Chantilly.' Consideration of all these facts led General Galliéni to a series of conclusions and resolves. First, he wished to bring Joffre to Paris, from which centre he would exercise that general command over all the French armies, whether in France or the Orient, which had been entrusted to him. Secondly, he wished to place General de Castelnau at the head of the armies in France. Thirdly, he proposed to diminish in certain respects the undue powers which Chantilly had engrossed to itself, and to restore to the Ministry of War the administrative functions of which it had to a large extent been deprived. Galliéni laid proposals in this sense, though without actually naming Castelnau, before the Council of Ministers on March 7, 1916. France now had the opportunity of securing for her armies and for her Allies military leadership in the field of the first order, without at the same time losing any advantage which could be derived from the world prestige of Joffre.

The Cabinet was greatly alarmed. They feared a political and ministerial crisis, as well as a crisis in the Supreme Command—all during the height of the great battles raging around Verdun. Briand intervened with dexterous argument, but General Galliéni was resolved. Stricken by an illness which compelled an early and grave opera-

tion, he had laid what he considered his testament and the last remaining service he could render France before his colleagues. When his advice was not accepted, he immediately resigned. For several days his resignation was kept a secret. Then it was explained on grounds of health, and the charge of the War Ministry was taken temporarily by the Minister of Marine. Finally, when his resolves were seen to be unshakable, a colourless but inoffensive successor was discovered in the person of General Roques, an intimate friend of Joffre and actually suggested by him. Thus did General Joffre receive a renewed lease of power sufficient to enable him to add to the dearly bought laurels of Verdun the still more costly trophies of the Somme.

Unity of
Front.

Galliéni was now to quit the scene for ever. Within a fortnight of his resignation he withdrew to a private hospital for an operation—at his age of the greatest danger—but which, if successful, meant a swift restoration of activity and health. From the effects of this operation he expired on May 27. To his memory and record not only his countrymen, but also their Allies, who profited by his genius, sagacity and virtue, and might have profited far more, should not fail to do justice.

* * * *

After the disasters of 1915 an earnest effort had been made by the British, French and Russian Governments to concert their action for 1916. No sooner had Briand attained the Premiership than he used a phrase which pithily expressed the first great and obvious need of the Allies—'Unity of front.' Unity of front did not mean unity of command. That idea, although it had dawned on many minds, was not yet within the bounds of possibility. Unity of front, or 'only one front,' meant that the whole great circle of fire and steel within which the Allies were gripping the Central Powers should be treated and organized as if it were the line of a single army or a single nation; that everything planned on one part of the front should be related to everything planned on every other part of the front; that instead of a succession of disconnected offensives, a combined and simultaneous effort should be made by the three great Allies to overpower and beat down the barriers

Genesis
of the
Somme.

of hostile resistance. In these broad and sound conceptions Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Kitchener, Monsieur Briand, General Joffre, General Cadorna, the Czar and General Alexeieff, all four Governments and all four General Staffs, were in full accord.

In pursuance and execution of this conception it had been decided to make a vast combined onslaught upon Germany and Austria, both in the east and in the west, during the summer months. The Russians could not be ready till June, nor the British till July. It was therefore agreed that a waiting policy should as far as possible be followed during the first six months of the year, while the Russians were re-equipping and increasing their armies, while the new British armies were perfecting their training, and while enormous masses of shells and guns were being accumulated. To these immense labours all four great nations thenceforth committed themselves.

It was further agreed that the Russians should endeavour to hold the Germans as far as possible on the northern part of the Eastern Front, and that the main Russian attack should be launched in Galicia in the southern theatre. At the same time, or in close relation to this, it was decided that a tremendous offensive, exceeding in scale anything ever previously conceived, should be delivered by the British and French, hand in hand, astride of the Somme (*à cheval sur la Somme*). It was intended to attempt to break through on a front of seventy kilometres: the English to the north of the Somme on the twenty-five kilometres from Hébuterne to Maricourt; and the French astride the Somme, but mainly to the south of it, on a forty-five-kilometre front from Maricourt right down to Lassigny. Two entire British armies, the Third and Fourth, under Allenby and Rawlinson, and comprising from twenty-five to thirty divisions, constituted the British attack; and three French armies, the Second, the Sixth and the Third, comprising thirty-nine divisions, were to be placed under the command of Foch for the French sector. The whole of these five armies, aggregating over one and a half million men and supported by four or five thousand guns, were thus to be hurled upon the Germans at a moment when it was hoped they and

their Austrian allies would already be heavily and critically engaged on the Eastern Frontiers. The original scheme for this stupendous battle was outlined in December, 1915, at the first Conference of the Allied General Staffs at Chantilly, and its final shape was determined at a second conference on February 14.

Reaction
of Verdun
upon the
Somme
Plan.

The ink was hardly dry on these conventions when the cannon of Verdun began to thunder, and the Germans were seen advancing successfully upon the neglected defences of that fortress. It is certainly arguable that the French would have been wise to have played with the Germans around Verdun, economizing their forces as much as possible, selling ground at a high price in German blood wherever necessary, and endeavouring to lead their enemies into a pocket or other unfavourable position. In this way they might have inflicted upon the Germans very heavy losses without risking much themselves, and as we now know they would certainly have baffled Falkenhayn's plan of wearing out the French Army and beating it to pieces upon the anvil. By the end of June the Germans might thus have exhausted the greater part of their offensive effort, advancing perhaps a dozen miles over ground of no decisive strategic significance, while all the time the French would have been accumulating gigantic forces for an overwhelming blow upon the Somme.

However, other counsels—or shall we call them passions?—prevailed, and the whole French nation and army hurled itself into the struggle around Verdun. This decision not only wore out the French reserves and consumed the offensive strength of their army, but it greatly diminished the potential weight of the British attack which was in preparation. Already before the German attack opened, Sir Douglas Haig had taken over an additional sector of the French front, liberating, as we have seen, the Second French Army which was thus enabled to restore the situation at Verdun. As soon as the Battle of Verdun had begun, Joffre requested Haig to take over a fresh sector, and this was accordingly effected in the early days of March, thus liberating the whole of the Tenth French Army. Thus the number of British divisions resting and training

The
Revival of
Russia.

for the great battle was at the outset sensibly diminished. As the Verdun conflict prolonged itself and deepened all through March, April and May, the inroads upon the fighting strength and disposable surplus of the French Army became increasingly grave. And as July approached the thirty-nine French divisions of the original scheme had shrunk to an available eighteen. This greatly diminished the front of the battle and the weight behind the blow. The numbers available were reduced by at least one-third, and the front to be attacked must be contracted from seventy to about forty-five kilometres. Whereas in the original conception the main onslaught would have been made by the French with the British co-operating in great strength as a smaller army, these rôles had now been reversed by the force of events. The main effort must be made by the British, and it was the French who would co-operate to the best of their ability in a secondary rôle.

* * * * *

While the eyes of the world were riveted on the soul-stirring frenzy of Verdun, and while the ponderous preparations for the Allied counter-stroke on the Somme were being completed, great events were at explosion-point in the East. To those who knew that Russia was recovering her strength with every day, with every hour that passed, who knew of the marshalling of her inexhaustible manhood, and the ever-multiplying and broadening streams of munitions of war which were flowing towards her, the German attack on Verdun had come with a sense of indescribable relief. Russia had been brought very low in the preceding autumn, before the rearguards of the winter closed down on her torn and depleted line. But mortal injury had been warded off. Her armies had been extricated, her front was maintained, and now behind it 'the whole of Russia' was labouring to re-equip and reconstitute her power.

Few episodes of the Great War are more impressive than the resuscitation, re-equipment and renewed giant effort of Russia in 1916. It was the last glorious exertion of the Czar and the Russian people for victory before both were to sink into the abyss of ruin and horror. By the summer of 1916 Russia, who eighteen months before had been almost

disarmed, who during 1915 had sustained an unbroken series of frightful defeats, had actually managed, by her own efforts and the resources of her Allies, to place in the field—organized, armed and equipped—sixty Army Corps in place of the thirty-five with which she had begun the war. The Trans-Siberian Railway had been doubled over a distance of 6,000 kilometres, as far east as Lake Baikal. A new railway 1,400 kilometres long, built through the depth of winter at the cost of unnumbered lives, linked Petrograd with the perennially ice-free waters of the Murman coast. And by both these channels munitions from the rising factories of Britain, France and Japan, or procured by British credit from the United States, were pouring into Russia in broadening streams. The domestic production of every form of war material had simultaneously been multiplied many fold.

The Fatal Defect.

It was however true that the new Russian armies, though more numerous and better supplied with munitions than ever before, suffered from one fatal deficiency which no Allied assistance could repair. The lack of educated men, men who at least could read and write, and of trained officers and sergeants, woefully diminished the effectiveness of her enormous masses. Numbers, brawn, cannon and shells, the skill of great commanders, the bravery of patriotic troops, were to lose two-thirds of their power for want, not of the higher military science, but of Board School education ; for want of a hundred thousand human beings capable of thinking for themselves and acting with reasonable efficiency in all the minor and subordinate functions on which every vast organization—most of all the organization of modern war—depends. The mighty limbs of the giant were armed, the conceptions of his brain were clear, his heart was still true, but the nerves which could transform resolve and design into action were but partially developed or non-existent. This defect, irremediable at the time, fatal in its results, in no way detracts from the merit or the marvel of the Russian achievement, which will for ever stand as the supreme monument and memorial of the Empire founded by Peter the Great.

At the beginning of the summer the Russian front, stretch-

Brusiloff's
Offensive.

ing 1,200 kilometres from the Baltic to the Roumanian frontier, was held by three main groups of armies, the whole aggregating upwards of 134 divisions: the northern group under the veteran Kouropatkine; the centre group (between the Pinsk and the Pripet) under Evert; the southern group (to the south of the Pripet) under Brusiloff. Against this array the Central Empires marshalled the German armies of Hindenburg and Ludendorff in the north, of Prince Leopold of Bavaria and General von Linsingen opposite the centre and southern centre, and the three Austrian armies of the Archduke Frederick in the south. The drain of Verdun and the temptations of the Trentino had drawn or diverted from the Eastern Front both reserves and reinforcements, and practically all the heavy artillery. And in the whole of the sector south of the Pripet, comprising all Galicia and the Bukovina, not a German division remained to sustain the armies of the Austrian Archduke against the forces of Brusiloff.

The original scheme had contemplated July 1 as the date of the general Allied attack, both in the west and in the east. But the cries of Italy from the Trentino and the obvious strain under which the French were living at Verdun led to requests being made to the Czar to intervene if possible at an earlier date. Accordingly on June 4 Brusiloff, after a thirty-hours' bombardment, set his armies of over a million men in motion, and advanced in a general attack on the 350-kilometre front between the Pripet and the Roumanian frontier. The results were equally astounding to victors and vanquished, to friend and foe. It may well be that the very ante-dating of the attack imparted to it an element of surprise that a month later would have been lacking. Certainly the Austrians were entirely unprepared for the weight, vigour and enormous extent of the assault. The long loose lines in the east in no way reproduced the conditions of the Western Front. The great concentrations of artillery, the intricate systems of fortification, the continuous zones of machine-gun fire, the network of roads and railways feeding the front and enabling reserves to be thrown in thousands and tens of thousands in a few hours upon any threatened point, were entirely lacking in the east. More-

over, the Austrian armies contained large numbers of Czech troops fighting under duress for a cause they did not cherish and an Empire whose downfall they desired. Surprise.

No one was more surprised than Falkenhayn.

'After the failure,'¹ he wrote, 'of the March offensive in Lithuania and Courland, the Russian front had remained absolutely inactive. . . . There was no reason whatever to doubt that the front was equal to any attack on it by the forces opposing it at the moment. . . . General Conrad von Hötzendorf . . . declared that a Russian attack in Galicia could not be undertaken with any prospect of success in less than from four to six weeks from the time when we should have learnt that it was coming. This period at least would be required for the concentration of the Russian forces, which must be a necessary preliminary thereto. . . . However, before any indication of a movement of this sort had been noticed, to say nothing of announced, a most urgent call for assistance from our ally reached the German G.H.Q. on the 5th of June.

'The Russians, under the command of General Brusiloff, had on the previous day attacked almost the entire front, from the Styr-Bend, near Kolki, below Lutsk, right to the Roumanian borders. After a relatively short artillery preparation they had got up from their trenches and simply marched forward. Only in a few places had they even taken the trouble to form attacking groups by concentrating their reserves. It was a matter not simply of an attack in the true sense of the word, but rather of a big scale reconnaissance. . . .

'A "reconnaissance" like Brusiloff's was only possible, of course, if the General had decisive reason for holding a low opinion of his enemy's power of resistance. And on this point he made no miscalculation. His attack met with splendid success, both in Volhynia and in the Bukovina. East of Lutsk the Austro-Hungarian front was clean broken through, and in less than two days a yawning gap fully thirty miles wide had been made in it. The part of the 4th Austro-Hungarian Army, which was in line here, melted away into miserable remnants.

'Things went no better with the 7th Austro-Hungarian Army in the Bukovina. It flowed back along its entire front, and it was impossible to judge at the moment whether and when it could be brought to a halt again. . . .

¹ *General Headquarters 1914-1916 and its Critical Decisions: General von Falkenhayn*, pp. 244-247.

Conse-
quences.

'We were therefore faced with a situation which had fundamentally changed. A wholesale failure of this kind had certainly not entered into the calculations of the Chief of the General Staff (himself). He had considered it impossible.'

All along the front the Russian armies marched over the Austrian lines or through wide breaches in them. In the north the army of Kaledine advanced in three days on a 70-kilometre front no less than 50 kilometres, taking Lutsk. In the south the army of Letchitsky, forcing successively the lines of the Dniester and the Pruth, invested Czernovitch after an advance of 60 kilometres. The German front under Linsingen wherever attacked maintained itself unbroken or withdrew in good order in consequence of adjacent Austrian retirements. But within a week of the beginning of the offensive the Austrians had lost 100,000 prisoners, and before the end of the month their losses in killed, wounded, dispersed and prisoners amounted to nearly three-quarters of a million men. Czernovitch and practically the whole of the Bukovina had been reconquered, and the Russian troops again stood on the slopes of the Carpathians. The scale of the victory and the losses of the defeated in men, material and territory were the greatest which the war in the east had yet produced.

The Austrian offensive on the Trentino was instantly paralysed, and eight divisions were recalled and hurried to the shattered Eastern Front. Although the Battle of Verdun was at its height and Falkenhayn deeply committed to procuring at least a moral decision there, and while he could watch each week the storm clouds gathering denser and darker on the Somme, he found himself forced to withdraw eight German divisions from France to repair those dykes he had so improvidently neglected in the east, or at any rate to limit the deluge now pouring forward impetuously in so many directions. The Hindenburg-Ludendorff armies, which had successfully sustained the subsidiary attacks delivered by the Russians upon their front, were also called upon to contribute large reinforcements for the south; and an immense German effort was made to close the breaches and re-establish the Southern Front. By the end of June

the failure of the Austro-German campaign of 1916, which had opened with such high prospects, was apparent. The Trentino offensive was hamstrung ; Verdun was in Ludendorff's words ' an open wasting sore ' ;¹ and a disaster of the first magnitude had been suffered in that very portion of the Eastern Front which had offered the most fruitful prospects to Teutonic initiative. But this was not the end. The main struggle of the year was about to begin in the west, and Roumania, convulsed with excitement at the arrival of victorious Russian armies before her very gates, loomed up black with the menace of impending war.

The Price
of Verdun.

¹ *War Memories*, Vol. I., p. 267.

CHAPTER V

JUTLAND: THE PRELIMINARIES

*'A thousand years scarce serve to form a State;
An hour may lay it in the dust.'*

A Battle or an Encounter—Risks of forcing a Battle—Strategic Consequences of British Victory and Defeat—Unequal Stakes—Sir John Jellicoe—Under-water Dangers—Extreme Precautions—Jellicoe's Letter of October 14, 1914—The Admiralty Reply—Changing Conditions—Admiralty Intelligence—The Rival Fleets—The Grand Fleet at Sea—'Enemy in Sight'—Delay of the 5th Battle Squadron—Beatty's Decision—Hipper's Trap—The Battle-cruiser Action—The Immortal Marine—The Crisis Surmounted—Intervention of the 5th Battle Squadron—The High Sea Fleet in Sight—The Run to the North—The Ordeal of the 5th Battle Squadron—The End of the First Phase.

A Battle
or an
Encounter.

THERE are profound differences between a battle where both sides wish for a full trial of strength and skill, and a battle where one side has no intention of fighting to a finish, and seeks only to retire without disadvantage or dishonour from an unequal and undesired combat. The problems before the Commanders, the conditions of the conflict itself, are widely different in a fleeting encounter—no matter how large its scale—from those of a main trial of strength. In an encounter between forces obviously unequal, the object of the weaker is to escape, and that of the stronger to catch and destroy them. Many of the tactical processes and manœuvres appropriate to a battle where both sides throw their whole might into the scale and continue at death-grips till the climax is reached and victory declares itself are not adapted to a situation in which keeping contact is the task of the stronger and evasion the duty of the weaker.

This is especially true of the preliminaries; the mode of approach, the deployment of the fleet, the development

of the fire, the methods of meeting or parrying the attack of torpedo craft, would naturally be modified according to the view taken of the intentions of the enemy. If he were expected to seek a fight to a finish, there would be no need for hurry. There would be every reason to economize loss in the earlier stages and make every ship and gun play its maximum part in a supreme crisis. If on the other hand the enemy was certain to make off as soon as he saw himself in the presence of very superior forces, it would be necessary for the stronger fleet to run greater risks if it was determined to force a battle. Not only the light forces and the fast heavy ships would be thrown forward to attack, but the battle fleet itself would be driven at a speed which would leave the slowest squadrons and the slowest ships tailing away behind. Thus the pursuing squadrons would not come into action simultaneously but successively.

Risks of
forcing a
Battle.

Moreover, modern inventions give new advantages to a retreating fleet. It may entice its enemy across mine-fields through which perhaps it alone knows the channels, or into a carefully prepared ambushade of submarines. It can throw out mines behind it. It can fire torpedoes across the course of a pursuing fleet, and itself remain outside torpedo range. From these and other technical causes there can be no doubt that the task of forcing a battle against the enemy's desire involves a far higher degree of risk to the stronger fleet than would arise in a trial of strength willingly accepted or sought for by both sides. In studying the naval encounter of Jutland, the first question upon which it is necessary to form an opinion is what extra degree of risk, beyond the risk of a pitched battle, the British Fleet was justified in incurring in the hopes of bringing the Germans to action and destroying them. This question cannot be decided without reference to the general strategic situation on the seas.

If the German Fleet had been decisively defeated on May 31, 1916, in battle off Jutland, very great reliefs and advantages would have been gained by the Allies. The psychological effect upon the German nation cannot be estimated,

Consequences of
British
Victory and
Defeat.

but might conceivably have been profound. The elimination of the German Battle Fleet would have been an important easement to Great Britain, enabling men and material required by the Admiralty for the Grand Fleet to be diverted for the support of the Army. It would have brought the entry of the Baltic into immediate practical possibility. Whether the presence of the British squadrons in the Baltic during the winter of 1916 and the spring of 1917 would have prevented the Russian Revolution is a speculative question, but one which cannot be overlooked. The reactions of a great defeat at sea upon the U-boat attack of 1917, which the Germans were actively preparing, are diverse. On the one hand the disappearance of most of the German battleships might have led to a greater concentration of skilled men and resources upon the development of the U-boat campaign. On the other hand the liberation of the Grand Fleet flotillas and the increased sense of mastery at sea might well have led the Admiralty to more aggressive action against the German river mouths and to an earlier frustration of the U-boat attack. These important advantages must however be compared with the consequences to Britain and her Allies which would immediately have followed from a decisive British defeat. The trade and food-supply of the British islands would have been paralysed. Our armies on the Continent would have been cut from their base by superior naval force. All the transportation of the Allies would have been jeopardized and hampered. The United States could not have intervened in the war. Starvation and invasion would have descended upon the British people. Ruin utter and final would have overwhelmed the Allied cause.

The great disparity of the results at stake in a battle between the British and German navies can never be excluded from our thoughts. In a pitched battle fought to a conclusion on British terms between the British and German navies our preponderance was always sufficient to make victory reasonably probable, and in the spring of 1916 so great as to have made it certain. No such assurance could be felt, in the earlier days at any rate, about the results of a piecemeal pursuing engagement against a retreating

enemy. If that enemy succeeded in drawing part of our Fleet into a trap of mines or submarines, and eight or nine of the most powerful ships were blown up, the rest might have been defeated by the gunfire of the German fleet before the whole strength of the British line of battle could have reached the scene. This as we know was always the German dream: but there would certainly be no excuse for a Commander to take risks of this character with the British Fleet at a time when the situation on sea was entirely favourable to us. Neither would there be any defence for a British Admiralty which endeavoured to put pressure upon their Admiral to try to achieve some spectacular result against his better judgment, and by overstraining risks when the prizes on either side were so unequal. To be able to carry on all business on salt water in every part of the world without appreciable let or hindrance, to move armies, to feed nations, to nourish commerce in the teeth of war, imply the possession of the command of the sea. If these are the tests, that priceless sovereignty was ours already. We had the upper hand; we had the advantage; time—so it then seemed, so in the end it proved—was on our side. We were under no compulsion to fight a naval battle except under conditions which made victory morally certain and serious defeat, as far as human vision goes, impossible. A British Admiralisimo cannot be blamed for making these grave and solid reasons the basis of his thought and the foundation from which all his decisions should spring.

Unequal
Stakes.

In the tense naval controversy upon Jutland the keenest minds in the Navy have sifted every scrap of evidence. Every minute has been measured. The speed, the course, the position of every ship great or small, at every period in the operation, have been scrutinized. The information in the possession of every Admiral in each phase has been examined, weighed, canvassed. The dominant school of naval thought and policy are severe critics of Sir John Jellicoe. They disclaim all personal grounds or motives; they affirm that the tradition and future of the British Navy join in demanding that a different doctrine, other methods and above all another spirit must animate our

Sir John
Jellicoe.

captains at sea, if ever and whenever the Navy is once again at war. They declare that such an affirmation is more important to the public than the feelings of individuals, the decorous maintenance of appearances, the preservation of a superficial harmony, or the respect which may rightly be claimed by a Commander-in-Chief who, over the major portion of the war, discharged an immense and indeed inestimable responsibility.

Sir John Jellicoe was in experience and administrative capacity unquestionably superior to any British Admiral. He knew every aspect and detail of his profession. Afloat or at the Admiralty his intellect, energy, and efficiency won equal confidence from those he served and those he led. Moreover, he was a fine sea officer, capable of handling in the most difficult circumstances of weather and navigation the immense Fleet with which he was entrusted. He had served on active service in more than one campaign with courage and distinction. Before the war he was marked out above all others for the supreme command. When at its outbreak he assumed this great duty, his appointment was acclaimed alike by the nation and the Navy. Nearly two years of the full strain of war had only enhanced the confidence and affection with which he was regarded by his officers and men. In judging his discharge of his task we must consider first his knowledge and point of view; secondly, the special conditions of the war; and thirdly, the spirit which should impel the Royal Navy.

The standpoint of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Grand Fleet was unique. His responsibilities were on a different scale from all others. It might fall to him as to no other man—Sovereign, Statesman, Admiral or General—to issue orders which in the space of *two or three hours* might nakedly decide who won the war. The destruction of the British Battle Fleet was final. Jellicoe was the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon. First and foremost, last and dominating, in the mind of the Commander-in-Chief stood the determination not to hazard the Battle Fleet. The risk of under-water damage by torpedo and mine, and the

consequent destruction of British battleship superiority, lay heavy upon him. It far outweighed all considerations of the results on either side of gunfire. It was the main preoccupation of Admiralty thought before the war. From the opening of hostilities the spectacle of great vessels vanishing in a few moments as the result of an under-water explosion constantly deepened the impression. Alone among naval authorities of the highest order Sir Reginald Custance had maintained the contrary view, and had ceaselessly laboured to correct what he conceived to be the exaggerated importance attached to the Whitehead torpedo. Again and again I have heard him contend that the torpedo would play only a very unimportant part in a great sea battle, and that the issue would be decided by a combination of gunfire and manœuvre. The results of Jutland seem to vindicate this unfashionable opinion. For twelve hours the main fleets of Britain and Germany were at sea in close contact with one another both by day and by night, amid torpedo flotillas of the highest strength and quality numbered by scores, and only three large ships out of over a hundred exposed to the menace were seriously damaged by the torpedo. The purely passive rôle enjoined upon the British destroyers during the night may partially explain this result. It was certainly at variance with the pre-war expectations of most of the leading naval authorities in England.

Under-water
Dangers.

The safety and overwhelming strength of the Grand Fleet was Jellicoe's all-embracing aim. Its strength must be continually augmented. Every service ancillary to the Battle Fleet must be continually developed on the largest scale and to the highest efficiency. Every vessel that the northern harbours could contain must be placed at his disposal. With this object the Commander-in-Chief in his official letters to the Admiralty and by every other channel open to him continually dwelt upon the weakness and deficiencies of the force at his disposal, and at the same time magnified the power of the enemy. This habit of mind had been acquired during many years of struggle for money with peace-time Governments. It had now become ingrained in his nature. We have seen in

Extreme
Precautions.

the first volume evidences of this cautious and far from sanguine mood.¹

The enemy, according to his view, would be more numerous than the Admiralty Intelligence Department admitted. Their best ships would be found re-armed with much heavier guns. The speed of these vessels would turn out to be greater than we knew. Almost certainly they had some astonishing surprises in store. 'The Germans,' he had written to Lord Fisher on December 4, 1914, 'would have eight flotillas comprising eighty-eight torpedo-boat destroyers, all of which would certainly be ready at the selected moment. They had five torpedoes each: total 440 torpedoes—*unless I can strike at them first.*' He then argued that he might fall as low as 32, or even 28, destroyers. 'You know,' he added, 'the difficulty and objections to turning away from the enemy in a Fleet action: but with such a menace I am bound to do it, unless my own torpedo boat destroyers can stop or neutralize the movement.' At the date which this story has now reached he was convinced that the 10,000 yards correctly assigned by the Admiralty Intelligence Department as the extreme range of the German torpedo was too little: 15,000 yards must be the margin of safety on which he should rely. Even at the very end of his command, when a large part of the American Navy was serving with our own and when the strength of the Allied Fleets was at least four times that of their antagonists, he is still found seriously disquieted at his relative strength in battle-cruisers. It is obvious that there are limits beyond which this outlook ceases to contribute to the gaining of victory in war. But this does not affect the main argument.

All Jellicoe's thought was rightly centred upon the naval battle which he would some day have to fight. On October 14, 1914, he addressed to the Admiralty a letter which reveals his deepest conviction and his consistent intentions. From this extensive quotation is necessary.

' . . . The Germans have shown that they rely to a very great extent on submarines, mines and torpedoes, and

¹ Vol. I, p. 443.

there can be no doubt whatever that they will endeavour to make the fullest use of these weapons in a fleet action, especially since they possess an actual superiority over us in these particular directions. It therefore becomes necessary to consider our own tactical methods in relation to these forms of attack. . . .

Jellicoe's
Letter of
Oct. 14,
1914.

'The German submarines, if worked as is expected with the battle fleet, can be used in one of two ways:—

- (a) With the cruisers, or possibly with destroyers;
- (b) With the battle fleet.

'In the first case the submarines would probably be led by the cruisers to a position favourable for attacking our battle fleet as it advanced to deploy, and in the second case they might be kept in a position in rear, or to the flank, of the enemy's battle fleet, which would move in the direction required to draw our own Fleet into contact with the submarines.

'The first move at (a) should be defeated by our own cruisers, provided we have a sufficient number present, as they should be able to force the enemy's cruisers to action at a speed which would interfere with submarine tactics. . . .

'The second move at (b) can be countered by judicious handling of our battle fleet, but may, and probably will, involve a refusal to comply with the enemy's tactics by moving in the invited direction. If, for instance, the enemy battle fleet were to turn away from an advancing fleet, I should assume that the intention was to lead us over mines and submarines, and should decline to be so drawn.

'I desire particularly to draw the attention of their Lordships to this point, since it may be deemed a refusal of battle, and, indeed, might possibly result in failure to bring the enemy to action as soon as is expected and hoped.

'Such a result would be absolutely repugnant to the feelings of all British Naval Officers and men, but with new and untried methods of warfare new tactics must be devised to meet them.

'I feel that such tactics, if not understood, may bring odium upon me, but so long as I have the confidence of their Lordships, I intend to pursue what is, in my considered opinion, the proper course to defeat and annihilate the enemy's battle fleet, without regard to uninstructed opinion or criticism.

'The situation is a difficult one. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that half of our battle fleet might be disabled by under-water attack before the guns opened fire at all, if a false step is made, and I feel that I must

The
Admiralty
Reply.

constantly bear in mind the great probability of such attack and be prepared tactically to prevent its success.

'The safeguard against submarines will consist in moving the battle fleet at very high speed to a flank before deployment takes place or the gun action commences.

'This will take us off the ground on which the enemy desires to fight, but it may, of course, result in his refusal to follow me. . . .

'The object of this letter is to place my views before their Lordships, and to direct their attention to the alterations in preconceived ideas of battle tactics which are forced upon us by the anticipated appearance in a fleet action of submarines and minelayers. . . .'

Lord Fisher, Sir Arthur Wilson, and the Chief of the Naval Staff, then Admiral Sturdee, all considered fully this communication, which was of course only one of a regular stream of reports, despatches and private letters from the Commander-in-Chief. They had no doubt what answer should be sent. They advised me that Sir John Jellicoe's statement should receive the general approval of the Board of Admiralty. I agreed fully with their advice. An answer in the contrary sense was obviously impossible. To tell the Commander-in-Chief of the British Fleet, in the strategic situation which then existed, that even if he suspected the German Fleet were retiring to lead him into a trap of mines and submarines, he should nevertheless follow directly after them, and that if he failed to bring them to battle by manœuvring against his better judgment, no matter what the risk, he would be held blameworthy, would have been madness. The fullest possible latitude of manœuvre, the strongest assurances of personal confidence, were the indefeasible right of any officer in his great situation. Moreover, in October, 1914, our margins of superiority were at their minimum. A plurality of only six or seven Dreadnoughts could be counted on with certainty. We had never met the enemy's great ships in battle. No one could say with certainty to what degree of excellence their gunnery or torpedo practice had attained, or whether their projectiles or their tactics contained some utterly unexpected feature. There was certainly no reason in this first phase of the

naval war for seeking a battle except on the best conditions. Changing
Conditions.

I take the fullest responsibility for approving at this date the answer proposed to me by the First Sea Lord, Sir Arthur Wilson, and the Chief of the Staff. If I had not agreed with it, I should not have allowed it to pass unchallenged. But I was far from sharing the Commander-in-Chief's impressions upon the relative strength and quality of the British and German Fleets. I always believed that the British line of battle could fight the Germans ship for ship, and should never decline an encounter on those terms. I always regarded every addition to equality on our side as a precautionary advantage, not necessary to the gaining of victory, but justified by the far greater stake which a naval battle involved to Britain than to Germany. These views appeared to be vindicated three months later when on January 24, 1915, Admiral Beatty with five battle-cruisers met Admiral Hipper with four. On the morrow of that action, January 26, I wrote to Sir John Jellicoe as follows :—

‘The action on Sunday bears out all I have thought of the relative British and German strength. It is clear that at five to four they have no thought but flight, and that a battle fought out on this margin could have only one ending. The immense power of the 13·5-inch gun is clearly decisive on the minds of the enemy, as well as on the progress of the action. I should not feel the slightest anxiety at the idea of your engaging with equality. Still I think it would be bad management on our part if your superiority was not much nearer six to four than five to four, even under the worst conditions.’

And to the Prime Minister, January 24, 1915, 3.45 p.m. :—

‘This action gives us a good line for judging the results of a general battle. It may be roughly said that we should probably fight six to four at the worst, whereas to-day was five to four.’

In the great episode which has now to be described the British superiority was not five to four, nor six to four ; it was at least two to one. Sir John Jellicoe is fully justified in pointing to his letter of October 14 as a proof that

Admiralty
Intelligence.

his conduct in the stress of action was in accord with what he had long purposed in cold blood, and with a general tactical policy which he had already laid before the Board of Admiralty. But I do not accept on behalf of the Board of Admiralty of 1914 any responsibility for the actual conduct by the Commander-in-Chief of an operation which took place eighteen months later in conditions of relative strength different from those which existed in October, 1914, and, as will be seen as this account proceeds, in tactical circumstances entirely different from those which were contemplated by him in his letter. A perception that a decisive battle is not a necessity in a particular situation, and ought not to be purchased at a heavy risk, should not engender a defensive habit of mind or scheme of tactics.

After these preliminary observations the story may be told in its simplest form, with pauses to examine the issues involved at the crucial moments.

* * * * *

In the first volume of this account I recorded the events which secured for the Admiralty the incomparable advantage of reading the plans and orders of the enemy before they were executed. Without the cryptographers' department there would have been no Battle of Jutland. But for that department, the whole course of the naval war would have been different. The British Fleet could not have remained continuously at sea without speedily wearing down its men and machinery. Unless it had remained almost continuously at sea, the Germans would have been able to bombard two or three times a month all our East Coast towns. The simplest measurements on the chart will show that their battle-cruisers and other fast vessels could have reached our shores, inflicted an injury, and returned each time safely, or at least without superior attack, to their own home bases. Such a state of affairs would not necessarily have altered the final course of the war. The nation would have been forced to realize that the ruin of its East Coast towns was as much their part of the trial and burden as the destruction of so many Provinces to France. After national resentment had expended itself in the removal of one or more Governments or Boards of

Admiralty, a resolute people would have faced the facts with which they were confronted, would indeed have derived from them a new vigour of resistance.

Admiralty
Intelligence.

But it so chanced that they were spared this particular ordeal. The secret signal-books of the German Navy fell into the hands of the Russians in the Baltic when the light cruiser *Magdeburg* was sunk in October, 1914, and were conveyed to London. These signal-books and the charts connected with them were subjected to a study in Whitehall in which self-effacing industry and imaginative genius reached their highest degree. By the aid of these books and the deductions drawn from their use, the Admiralty acquired the power of reading a proportion of the German wireless messages. Well as was the secret kept, the coincidence of events aroused suspicion in the German mind. They knew the British squadrons could not always be at sea; and yet often when a German raid was launched, there at the interception point, or very near it, were found important British naval forces. They therefore redoubled the precaution of their codes. Moreover, they had themselves pierced to some extent the British codes, and had actually established at Neumünster a station for transmitting to their Fleet intercepted British messages. Nevertheless, during the central period of the war at any rate the Admiralty were capable of presenting to the Fleet a stream of valuable information.

The Naval Staff discovered in the last week of May, 1916, peculiar symptoms of impending activity in the German Fleet. The Intelligence had from other sources reported the appointment of Admiral Scheer to the chief command. This officer was reputed at the time to be the advocate of an aggressive war policy at sea. He had espoused an unlimited submarine campaign. He was the nominee of Tirpitz the Bold. The cautious and even timid tactics adopted by the German Navy under the direct orders of the Emperor ever since Beatty had broken into the Heligoland Bight at the end of August, 1914, were now to be abandoned. Admiral Scheer planned offensive action against the English coast for the purpose of drawing the British Fleet out over

The Rival
Fleets.

prepared ambushes of submarines, and then if Fortune was favourable fighting that weakened Fleet, or better still a detached division of it, a decisive battle for the command of the seas. The imminence of an important operation was deduced by the Admiralty from the whole body of their intelligence.

At five o'clock on May 30 the Admiralty informed the Fleet that there were indications of the Germans putting to sea. The Fleet, which had been previously ordered to raise steam, was directed to concentrate 'eastward of the Long Forties' (about 60 miles east of the Scottish coast) ready for eventualities.

The two Fleets that put to sea in the evening of May 30, 1916, constituted the culminating manifestation of naval force in the history of the world. But tremendous as was the power of the German Fleet, it could not compare with the British in numbers, speed or gun power. The British marshalled 28 Dreadnought battleships and 9 battle-cruisers against Admiral Scheer's 16 Dreadnoughts and 5 battle-cruisers. In addition the Germans had 6 pre-Dreadnought ships of the Deutschland class, whose slow speed and poor armament made them a source of anxiety to the German Commander. The speed of the British Fleet was decidedly superior. Its slowest battleship could steam 20 knots, while the 5th Battle Squadron, comprising four *Queen Elizabeths*, the strongest and swiftest battleships afloat, was capable of steaming 24 to 25 knots. The fastest German battleship could only steam 21 knots, while the 6 Deutschlands reduced the combined maximum speed of the Battle Fleet to 16 knots.

Still greater was the British superiority in gun fire. Sir John Jellicoe's battleships and battle-cruisers mounted 272 heavy guns against 200 German. But this superiority in numbers was magnified by an enormous superiority in size: 48 British 15-inch, 10 14-inch, 142 13.5-inch, and 144 12-inch guns were matched against 144 German 12-inch and 100 11-inch, making a total British broadside of 396,700 lbs. against a German of 189,958.

The torpedo strength of the two fleets, including vessels of every class, was numerically almost equal. The British

mounted 382 21-inch and 75 18-inch torpedo tubes; the Germans 362 19·7-inch and 107 17·7 inch. The smaller short-ranged class of torpedoes on either side were hardly likely to be serviceable in a daylight action; and the British 21-inch were slightly superior to the German 19·7-inch in range and in speed. A clear advantage even in this arm therefore rested with the British.

The Grand
Fleet at
Sea.

The British preponderance in capital ships was fully maintained in cruisers and destroyers. The British had 31 cruisers at sea, of which eight were the most powerful armoured cruisers of the pre-Dreadnought era: the Germans had 11. On the long-expected day of battle Sir John Jellicoe, although not provided with the cruisers and destroyers of the Harwich force, could muster 85 destroyers to the German 72. As in the case of the larger ships, the numerical superiorities alike in cruisers and in destroyers were enhanced by a great additional strength in gun power in every class, and a large advantage in the speed of the cruisers and in the size of the destroyers. Inferiority in any important arm or factor cannot be discerned at any point in the British array.

In consequence of the Admiralty orders, Sir John Jellicoe concentrated from Scapa Flow and Cromarty 24 Dreadnought battleships, 3 battle-cruisers, 3 cruiser squadrons and 3 destroyer flotillas in the 'Long Forties' on the morning of May 31. He had sent Admiral Beatty from the Forth about 65 miles ahead of him with 6 battle-cruisers, 2 light cruiser squadrons, 2 flotillas and—massive addition—4 *Queen Elizabeths*. In this formation both were to steam towards the Heligoland Bight till 2 p.m. when, if nothing was seen, Beatty was to come back into sight of the Battle Fleet, which would turn eastward for a further sweep towards the Horn Reef before returning home. The distance of 65 miles between the main Fleet and its powerful scouting forces has been criticized as excessive. It precluded visual contact between the two portions of the Fleet, and impeded their harmonious combination in the all-important preliminary phases of a great battle. If Beatty, arriving at his rendezvous, found the enemy there or thereabouts, Jellicoe would be out of tactical relation and too far off to force a battle. This disposition had however

Enemy in
Sight.'

been used several times before ; and Beatty with his fast powerful ships was quite capable of acting independently. Both Admirals had been out so often on these sweeps that though all precautions were observed neither, on the skeleton information available, had any particular expectation of encountering the enemy.

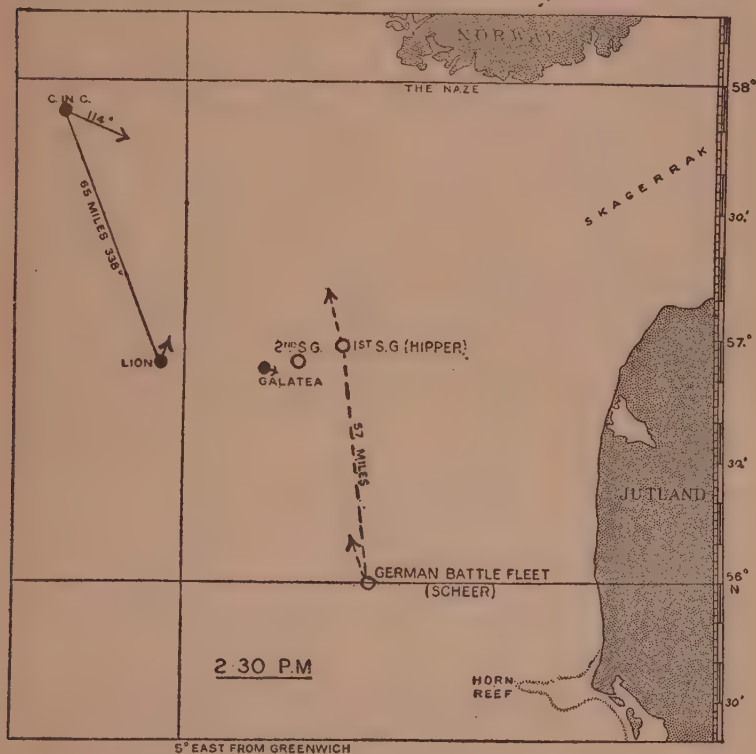
The day was bright and calm, and as the morning wore away such hopes as they had indulged gradually departed. The last gleam was finally extinguished by a signal from the Admiralty at 12.35 p.m. stating that directionals (i.e. directional wireless) placed the enemy flagship in the Jade at 11.10 a.m. Both Admirals tarried on their course to examine suspicious trawlers, and both were a few miles short of their prescribed positions and out of their reckoning when the hour for the battle-cruisers to turn northwards and close the Battle Fleet approached.¹ Admiral Beatty had already made the signal for an almost complete turn about, and at 2.15 p.m. all his heavy ships had obeyed it. His cruiser screen was in process of turning on to the new direction when the light cruiser *Galatea* saw a steamer about eight miles off apparently stopped and molested by two strange vessels. At 2.20 she signalled : ' Enemy in sight. Two cruisers probably hostile bearing south-east, course unknown.' The full situation is exposed in the plan facing this page. The strange vessels were two of the leading torpedo-boats of the German Second Scouting Group. All the British light cruisers began spontaneously to draw towards the *Galatea*, and eight minutes later she opened fire. One after another German light cruisers and destroyers emerged and defined themselves from the dimness of the horizon, and behind them a long smoke cloud declared the presence of important hostile forces.

The *Galatea*'s message at 2.20 and the sound of her guns at 2.28 were sufficient for Admiral Beatty. A hostile enterprise of some kind was in progress. German warships were at sea. At 2.32 the *Lion*, having already warned her consorts by signal of her intentions, turned about again,

¹ The main facts and times throughout this account are taken from the Official Admiralty Narrative of Jutland.

and increasing her speed to 22 knots set off in pursuit, steering for the Horn Reef Channel and meaning to cut whatever enemy might be abroad from their harbours. All the battle-cruisers followed the *Lion*, and executed the Vice-Admiral's order. But the 5th Battle Squadron, 4½ miles astern, continued to carry out the previous instructions, and for eight minutes steered in exactly the opposite direction along the left leg of a northward zigzag,

Delay of the
5th Battle
Squadron.



as if oblivious to the vital change in the situation. During these eight minutes the 5th Battle Squadron was losing touch with the battle-cruisers at the rate of over forty miles an hour. When eventually they turned at 2.40, they were already 10 miles behind the van. This loss of distance and time their best efforts were not able fully to retrieve before action was joined.

One of the many controversies of Jutland centres around this delay in turning the 5th Battle Squadron. On the

Beatty's
Decision.

one hand, it is contended that Rear-Admiral Evan-Thomas who commanded it did not make out the signal flags until 2.40.¹ On the other, it is claimed that he knew at 2.20 that enemy ships were in sight; that the *Barham*, his flagship, received at 2.30 by wireless the course about to be steered by the *Lion*; ² that his general and dominant orders were to keep supporting station 5 miles from the *Lion*; that whatever the difficulty in reading the signal flags, the movements of the battle-cruisers were obvious; that no one on the *Barham's* bridge could miss seeing all the six enormous British ships only 9,000 yards away suddenly turn about and steer eastward towards the enemy; and that no flag signals or wireless orders were needed to require Rear-Admiral Evan-Thomas's battle squadron to conform to the movements of the force and of the Commander his whole purpose and duty was to support. Such are the rival views, and decision upon them is scarcely difficult. It is common ground between all parties that Admiral Evan-Thomas, once he realized the situation, did all in his power to recover the lost distance, and that, profiting by the manœuvring deviations of the converging and fighting lines, he in fact recovered upwards of four miles of it. The result however of his eight minutes' delay in turning was inexorably to keep him and his tremendous guns out of the action for the first most critical and most fatal half-hour, and even thereafter to keep him at extreme range.

But the question has also been raised: was Admiral Beatty right to turn instantly in pursuit of the enemy? Ought he not first to have closed on the 5th Battle Squadron and turned his whole ten great ships together? To this question the answer also seems clear. It is the duty of a Commander, whenever possible, to concentrate a superior force for battle. But Beatty's six battle-cruisers were in themselves superior in numbers, speed, and gun power to the whole of the German battle-cruisers, even if, as was not at this moment certain, any or all of these were at sea. The issue for the British Admiral was not therefore whether to concentrate a superior force or not, but

¹ Official Narrative: Lord Jellicoe's Remarks, Appendix G, p. 106.

² Admiralty footnote 2 to Lord Jellicoe's Remarks.

whether, having concentrated a superior force, to steam for six minutes away from the enemy in order to concentrate an overwhelming force. Six minutes' steaming away from the enemy might mean a loss of six thousand yards in pursuit. The last time Beatty had seen German ships was when Hipper's battle-cruisers faded out of the sight of the crippled *Lion* sixteen months before at the Dogger Bank. The impression that every minute counted was dominant in his mind. Why should he wait to become stronger when by every test of paper and every memory of battle he was already strong enough? Had the 5th Battle Squadron turned when he turned, it would have been in close support if fighting occurred and took an adverse turn. The doctrine that after sufficient force has been concentrated an Admiral should delay, and at the risk of losing the whole opportunity gather a still larger force, was one which could only be doubtfully applied even to the Battle Fleet, and would paralyse the action of fast scouting forces. It would however no doubt have been better if the original cruising formation of the battle-cruisers and the 5th Battle Squadron had been more compact. But the facts, when at 2.32 Beatty decided that the enemy was present in sufficient strength to justify turning the heavy ships about, made it his clear duty to steam at once and at the utmost speed in their direction. All that impulse, all that ardour give was no doubt present in the Admiral's mind; but these were joined by all that the coldest science of war and the longest view of naval history proclaimed.

Beatty's
Decision.

It was unlikely that no stronger enemy forces should be behind the German scouting screen: but up till this moment nothing but light cruisers and destroyers had appeared. Now at about 3.20 the *New Zealand* sighted five enemy ships on her starboard bow; and from 3.31 onwards the *Lion* distinguished one after another the whole five German battle-cruisers. Admiral von Hipper had for an hour been passing through experiences similar to those of Admiral Beatty. His light cruisers had brushed into British scouting ships. He had hurried forward to their aid. Suddenly at 3.20 he was confronted with the appari-

Hipper's
Trap.

tion of Beatty's six battle-cruisers bearing down on him at full speed, accompanied by their flotillas and light cruisers and supported by the menace of dark smoke banks against the western sky. As on January 24, 1915, he acted with promptitude. He immediately turned about and ran apparently for home. But this time there were two new factors at work. Beatty knew for certain from their relative position in the sea that he could force his enemy to battle. Hipper knew that he was drawing Beatty into the jaws of the advancing High Sea Fleet. We see these splendid squadrons shearing through the waters that will soon be lashed by their cannonade, each Commander with the highest hopes—the British Admiral exulting because he had surely overtaken his foe ; the German nursing the secret of his trap. So for a space both fleets drove forward in a silence.

The combat of the battle-cruisers which preceded the encounter of the main Fleets off Jutland is a self-contained episode. Both Admirals, tactics apart, wished for a trial of strength and quality. Human beings have never wielded so resolutely such tremendous engines or such intense organizations of destruction. The most powerful guns ever used, the highest explosives ever devised, the fastest and the largest ships of war ever launched, the cream of the officers and men of the British and German nations, all that the martial science of either Navy could achieve—clashed against each other in this rigorous though intermittent duel. Each in turn faced an adverse superiority of numbers ; each had behind him supporting forces which, could they be made available, would have involved the destruction of the other. Hipper counted on the High Sea Fleet, and Beatty could always fall back on his four *Queen Elizabeths*. Each in turn retired before superior forces and endeavoured to draw his opponent into overwhelming disadvantage. The officers and the men on both sides showed themselves completely unaffected in their decisions and conduct by the frightful apparatus which they used upon each other ; and their conflict represents in its intensity the concentration and the consummation of the war effort of man. The battle-cruiser action would of course have

been eclipsed by a general battle between the main Fleets. But since this never occurred to any serious extent, the two hours' fight between Beatty and Hipper constitutes the prodigy of modern war on sea.

The Battle-cruiser Action.

The detailed story of the action has been told so often and told so well that it needs only brief repetition here. Both the German and French accounts are excellent, and the British Official Narrative is a model of exact and yet stirring professional description. The salient features can be recognized by anyone.

Both sides deliberately converged to effective striking distance. Fire was opened by the *Lützow* and answered by the *Lion* a little after a quarter to four. Each ship engaged its respective antagonist. As there were six



British to five German battle-cruisers, the *Lion* and the *Princess Royal* were able to concentrate on the enemy's flagship *Lützow*. The chances of the battle on either side led to discrepancies in the selection of targets, and sometimes two British ships were firing at one German, while another was ignored, or *vice versa*. Two minutes after the great guns had opened fire at about 14,000 yards, the *Lion* was hit twice; and the third salvo of the *Princess Royal* struck the *Lützow*. On both sides four guns at a time were fired, and at every discharge four shells each weighing about half a ton smote target or water in a volley. In the first thirty-seven minutes of an action which lasted above two hours, one-third of the British force was destroyed. At four o'clock the *Indefatigable*, after twelve minutes at battery with the *Von der Tann*, hit by three simultaneous shells from a salvo of four, blew up and sank almost without survivors.

The
Immortal
Marine.

Twenty-six minutes later the *Queen Mary*, smitten amidships by a plunging salvo from the *Derfflinger*, burst into flame, capsized, and after thirty seconds exploded into a pillar of smoke which rose 800 feet in the air, bearing with it for 200 feet such items as a 50-foot steamboat. The *Tiger* and the *New Zealand*, following her at the speed of an ordinary train, and with only 500 yards between them, had barely time to sheer off port and starboard to avoid her wreck. The *Tiger* passed through the smoke cloud black as night, and her gunnery officer, unable to fire, took advantage of the pitch-darkness to reset to zero the director controls of his four turrets.¹ Meanwhile the *Lion*, after being eight minutes in action, was hit on her midship turret (Q) by a shell which, but for a sublime act of personal devotion and comprehension, would have been fatal.

All the crew of the turret except its commanding officer, Major Hervey (Royal Marine Artillery), and his sergeant were instantly killed; and Major Hervey had both his legs shattered or torn off. Each turret in a capital ship is a self-contained organism. It is seated in the hull of the vessel like a fort; it reaches from the armoured gun-house visible to all, 50 feet downwards to the very keel. Its intricate hydraulic machinery, its ammunition trunk communicating with the shell-rooms and magazines—all turn together in whatever direction its twin guns may point. The shell of the *Lützow* wrecked the turret and set the wreckage on fire. The shock flung and jammed one of the guns upwards, and twenty minutes later the cartridge which was in its breech slid out. It caught fire and ignited the other charges in the gun-cages. The flash from these passed down the trunk to the charges at the bottom. None but dead and dying remained in the turret. All had been finished by the original shell burst. The men in the switch-board department and the handling parties of the shell-room were instantly killed by the flash of the cordite fire. The blast passed through and through the turret in all its passages and foundations, and rose 200 feet above its gaping roof. But the doors of the magazines were closed. Major Hervey, shattered, weltering, stifled, seared, had

¹ *Fighting at Jutland.*

found it possible to give the order down the voice tube: 'Close magazine doors and flood magazines.' So the *Lion* drove on her course unconscious of her peril, or by what expiring breath it had been effectually averted. In the long, rough, glorious history of the Royal Marines there is no name and no deed which in its character and its consequences ranks above this.

The Crisis
Surmounted.

Meanwhile the Vice-Admiral, pacing the bridge among the shell fragments rebounding from the water, and like Nelson of old in the brunt of the enemy's fire, has learned that the *Indefatigable* and the *Queen Mary* have been destroyed, and that his own magazines are menaced by fire. It is difficult to compare sea with land war. But each battle-cruiser was a unit comparable at least to a complete infantry division. Two divisions out of his six have been annihilated in the twinkling of an eye. The enemy, whom he could not defeat with six ships to five, are now five ships to four. Far away all five German battle-cruisers—grey smudges changing momentarily into 'rippling sheets of flame'—are still intact and seemingly invulnerable. 'Nevertheless,' proceeds the official narrative, 'the squadron continued its course undismayed.' But the movement of these blind, inanimate castles of steel was governed at this moment entirely by the spirit of a single man. Had he faltered, had he taken less than a conqueror's view of the British fighting chances, all these great engines of sea power and war power would have wobbled off in meaningless disarray. This is a moment on which British naval historians will be glad to dwell; and the actual facts deserve to be recorded. The *Indefatigable* had disappeared beneath the waves. The *Queen Mary* had towered up to heaven in a pillar of fire. The *Lion* was in flames. A tremendous salvo struck upon or about her following ship, the *Princess Royal*, which vanished in a cloud of spray and smoke. A signalman sprang on to the *Lion's* bridge with the words: '*Princess Royal* blown up, sir.' On this the Vice-Admiral said to his Flag Captain, 'Chatfield, there seems to be something wrong with our —— ships to-day. Turn two points to port,' i.e., two points nearer the enemy.

Thus the crisis of the battle was surmounted. All

Intervention
of the 5th
Battle
Squadron.

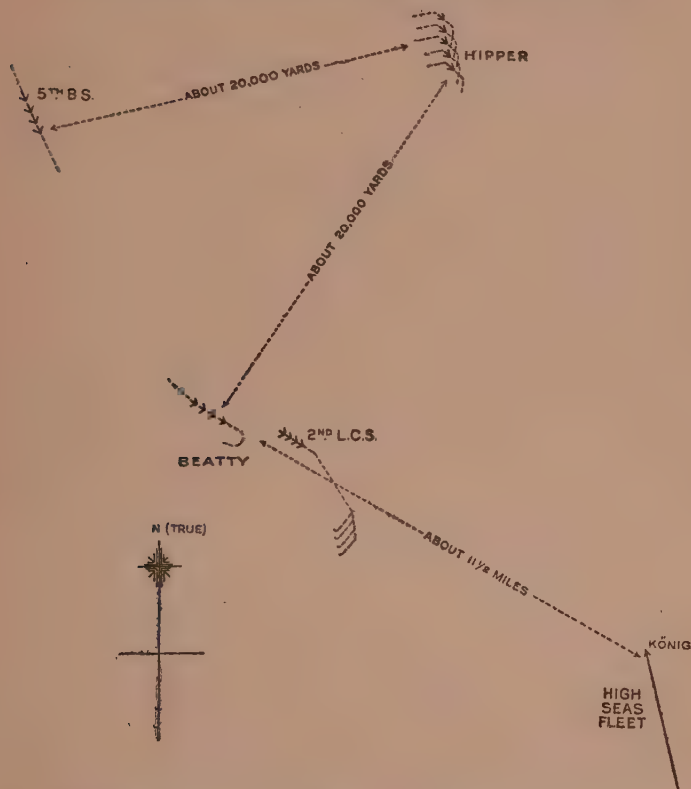
the German damage was done in the first half-hour. As the action proceeded the British battle-cruisers, although reduced to an inferiority in numbers, began to assert an ascendancy over the enemy. Their guns became increasingly effective, and they themselves received no further serious injury. The deterioration in the accuracy and rate of the German fire during the next hour and a half was obvious. Each side in turn manœuvred nearer to or farther from the enemy in order to frustrate his aim. And from ten minutes past four the 5th Battle Squadron had begun to fire, at the long range of 17,000 yards, upon Admiral von Hipper's last two ships. The influence of this intervention, tardy but timely, is somewhat lightly treated by the British official narrators. It receives the fullest testimony in the German accounts. The four mighty ships of Admiral Evan-Thomas threw their 15-inch shells with astonishing accuracy across the great distances which separated them from the German rear. If only they had been 5,000 yards closer, the defeat, if not the destruction, of Hipper's squadron was inevitable. That they were not 5,000 yards closer was due entirely to their slowness in grasping the situation when the first contact was made with the enemy. However, they now came thundering into battle; and their arrival within effective range would, in less than an hour, have been decisive—if no other German forces had been at sea that day. The battle-cruisers continued to fire at one another with the utmost rapidity at varying ranges. But from 4.30 onward the approaching and increasing fire of the 5th Battle Squadron, and the development by both sides of fierce destroyer attacks and counter-attacks, sensibly abated the intensity of their action.

Admiral Scheer, advancing with the whole High Sea Fleet, had received the news of the first contact between the light cruisers at 2.28 p.m., almost immediately after it had occurred. At 3.25 he learned of the presence of the British battle-cruisers. A message received at 3.45 from the 'Chief of Reconnaissance' showed that Admiral von Hipper was engaged with six enemy battle-cruisers on a south-easterly course. Scheer understood clearly

that Hipper was falling back upon him in the hopes of drawing the British battle-cruisers under the guns of the main German Fleet. He accordingly steered at first so as to take the pursuing British if possible between two fires. But when he heard a few minutes later that the *Queen Elizabeths* had also appeared upon the scene, he conceived it his duty to hasten directly to the support of his

The High
Sea Fleet in
Sight.

ENEMY BATTLESHIPS IN SIGHT, 4.40 P.M.



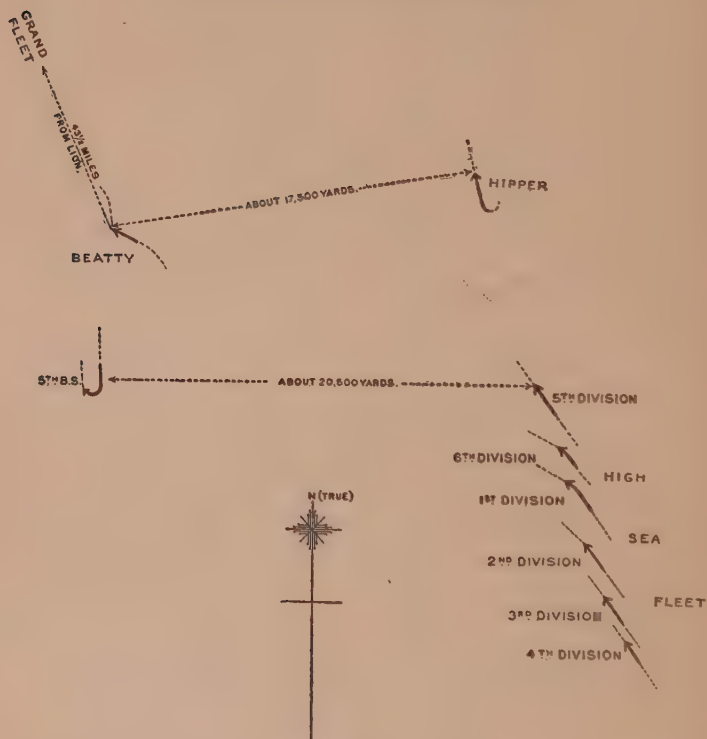
now outnumbered battle-cruisers. Leaving his older battle-ships to follow at their best pace, he therefore steamed north in line at 17 knots shortly after four o'clock. The opposing forces were now approaching each other at 43 miles an hour.

The 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron, heralding Beatty's advance and guarding him from surprise, was the first to see the hostile fleet. At 4.33 the *Southampton*, carrying

The Run to
the North.

Commodore Goodenough's broad pennant, sighted the head of the long line of German battleships drawing out upon the horizon, and signalled the magic words 'Battleships in sight.' Almost as soon as the reports of the light cruisers had reached the *Lion*, Beatty himself sighted the High Sea Fleet. He grasped the situation instantly. Without losing a moment he led his remaining four ships round in a complete turn, and steamed directly back along his

THE TURN TO THE NORTH. 5:00 P.M.



course towards Jellicoe. Hipper, now in touch with Scheer, turned immediately afterwards in the same direction. The situation of the two Admirals was thus exactly reversed: Beatty tried to lead Hipper and the German battle fleet up to Jellicoe; Hipper pursued his retreating foe without knowing that he was momentarily approaching the British Grand Fleet. In this phase of the action, which is called 'The Run to the North,' firing was continued by the battle-cruisers on both sides. The light was

now far more favourable to the British, and the German battle-cruisers suffered severely from their fire.

The Ordeal
of the 5th
Battle
Squadron.

On sighting the main German Fleet, Beatty had turned about so swiftly that his ships soon passed the 5th Battle Squadron coming up at full speed and still on their southerly course. As the two squadrons ran past each other on opposite courses, the *Lion* signalled to the *Barham* to turn about in succession. The *Lion's* signal of recall was flown at 4.48. She passed the *Barham* two miles away, with this signal flying, at 4.53; and Rear-Admiral Evan-Thomas responded to the signal three or four minutes later. Perhaps the Rear-Admiral, having been slow in coming into action, was inclined to be slow in coming out. Brief as was this interval, it was sufficient at the speed at which all the ships were moving to expose the 5th Battle Squadron to action with the van of the German Battle Fleet. The van was formed by the German 3rd Squadron, comprising the *Königs* and the *Kaisers*, the strongest and newest vessels in the German Navy. The four *Queen Elizabeths* were now subjected to tremendous fire concentrated particularly upon the point where each turned in succession. The two leading ships, the *Barham* and the *Valiant*, were engaged with the enemy's battle-cruisers; the rear ships, the *Warspite* and the *Malaya*, fought the whole of the finest squadron in the German Fleet. This apparently unequal conflict lasted for over half an hour. All the ships except the *Valiant* were struck repeatedly with the heaviest shells, the *Warspite* alone receiving thirteen hits and the *Malaya* seven. Such, however, was the strength of these vessels that none of their turrets were put out of action and their speed was wholly unaffected.

All the main forces were now fast drawing together, and all converged and arrived upon the scene in one great movement. Every ship was moving simultaneously, and after an almost unperceived interval, the duel of the battle-cruisers merged in the preliminaries of a general Fleet action.

CHAPTER VI

JUTLAND: THE ENCOUNTER

'Courage and Conduct: Rooke and Toulouse!'

[*Old Naval Ballad.*]

The Decisive and the Unknown—The Line of Battle—Jellicoe's System of Command—Admiral Scheer's Point of View—With the *Iron Duke*—Method of Deployment—Vital Information—Scouting Cruisers—The Meeting—Admiral Hood in Action—The *Defence* sunk—Need to Deploy the Fleet—Jellicoe's Decision—A Third Course—Neglect of the *Queen Elizabeths*—Progress of the Deployment—Destruction of the *Invincible*—Scheer turns away—The Second Opportunity—Scheer turns away again—Beatty renews the Action—Darkness falls—Scheer's Relief—Jellicoe's Problem—The Balance of Probability—The British Flotillas—The Admiralty's Decisive Message—Scheer's Escape—Nobody's Victory—The German Sortie of August 19—The Achievement of U-52—Some Conclusions—The Battle-cruiser Type—The Flash Danger—British and German Shell—Tactics—The Future.

The Decisive
and the
Unknown.

UP to this moment we have been moving through events which, although terrific, were nevertheless within the region of previous experience. The battle-cruisers had fought each other before, and their Admirals knew the character of the conflict, the power of the weapons and what the ordeal was like. Moreover, as has been said, on neither side did the battle-cruiser force amount to a vital stake. But the battlefleets themselves are now approaching each other at a closing speed of over thirty-five miles an hour, and with every minute we enter the kingdom at once of the Decisive and of the Unknown.

The supreme moment on which all the thought and efforts of the British and German Admiralties had been for many years concentrated was now at hand. On both sides nearly the whole naval effort of the nation had been devoted to the battlefleets. In the British Navy, at any rate, the picture of the great sea battle had dominated every other

thought, and its needs had received precedence over every other requirement. Everything had been lavished upon the drawing out of a line of batteries of such a preponderance and in such an order that the German battlefleet would be blasted and shattered *for certain* in a very short space of time. Numbers, gun power, quality, training—all had been provided for the Commander-in-Chief to the utmost extent possible to British manhood and science. Unless some entirely unforeseen factor intervened or some incalculable accident occurred, there was no reason to doubt that thirty minutes' firing within ten thousand yards between two parallel lines of battle would achieve a complete victory.

The Line of
Battle.

Therefore for years Jellicoe's mind had been focussed upon the simplest form of naval battle: the single line and the parallel course; a long-range artillery conflict; and defensive action against torpedo attack. Everything beyond this opening phase was speculative and complicated. If the opening phase were satisfactory, everything else would probably follow from it. The Admiralty could not look beyond providing their Commander-in-Chief with an ample superiority in ships of every kind. The method and moment of joining battle and its tactical conduct could be ruled by him alone. It is now argued that it would have been better if, instead of riveting all attention and endeavour upon a long-range artillery duel by the two fleets in line on roughly parallel courses, the much more flexible system of engaging by divisions, of using the fastest battleships apart from the slower, and of dealing with each situation according to the needs of the moment, had been employed. It may well be so; and had there been several battles or even encounters between the British and German fleets in the war, there is no doubt that a far higher system of battle tactics would have developed. But nothing like this particular event had ever happened before, and nothing like it was ever to happen again. The 'Nelson touch' arose from years of fighting between the strongest ships of the time. Nelson's genius enabled him to measure truly the consequences of any decision. But that genius worked upon precise practical data. He had seen the same sort of thing happen on a less great scale

Jellicoe's
System of
Command.

many times over before the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson did not have to worry about underwater damage. He felt he knew what would happen in a fleet action. Jellicoe did not know. Nobody knew. All he knew was that a complete victory would not improve decisively an already favourable naval situation, and that a total defeat would lose the war. He was prepared to accept battle on his own terms; he was not prepared to force one at a serious hazard. The battle was to be fought as he wished it or left unfought.

But while we may justify on broad grounds of national policy the general attitude of the Commander-in-Chief towards the conditions upon which alone a decisive battle should be fought, neither admiration nor agreement can adhere to the system of command and training which he had developed in the Fleet. Everything was centralized in the Flagship, and all initiative except in avoiding torpedo attack was denied to the leaders of squadrons and divisions. A ceaseless stream of signals from the Flagship was therefore required to regulate the movement of the Fleet and the distribution of the fire. These signals prescribed the course and speed of every ship, as well as every manœuvring turn. In exercises such a centralization may have produced a better drill. But in the smoke, confusion and uncertainty of battle the process was far too elaborate. The Fleet was too large to fight as a single organization or to be minutely directed by the finger of a single man. The Germans, following the Army system of command, had foreseen before the war that the intelligent co-operation of subordinates, who know thoroughly the general views and spirit of their Chief, must be substituted in a fleet action for a rigid and centralized control. At this moment the line in which they were approaching was in fact three self-contained independently manœuvring squadrons following one another. But Jellicoe's system denied initiative not only to his battle squadrons, but even to the flotillas. Throughout the battle he endeavoured personally to direct the whole Fleet. He could, as his own account describes,¹ only see or know a small part of what was taking place; and as no human mind can receive more

¹ *The Grand Fleet.*

than a limited number of impressions in any given period of time, his control disappeared as a guiding power and only remained as a check on the enterprise of others.

Admiral
Scheer's
Point of
View.

Let us now take the position of Admiral Scheer. He had no intention of fighting a battle against the whole British Fleet. He was under no illusions about the relative strength of the rival batteries. Nothing could be more clownish than to draw up his fleet on parallel courses with an opponent firing twice his weight of metal and manned by a personnel whose science, seamanship and fortitude commanded his sincere respect. He had not come out with any idea of fighting a pitched battle. He had never intended to fight at a hopeless disadvantage. If he met weaker forces or equal forces, or any forces which gave a fair or sporting chance of victory, he would fight with all the martial skill and courage inseparable from the German name. But from the moment he knew that he was in the presence of the united Grand Fleet and saw the whole horizon bristling with its might, his only aim was to free himself as quickly as possible without dishonour from a fatal trap. In this he was entirely successful.

He had sedulously practised the turn-about movement by which under cover of torpedo attacks and smoke screens every ship in the line could circle about individually and steam in the opposite direction without fail even if the line was itself a curve or marred by the 'kinks' and disorder of heavy action. To this manœuvre and to its thorough comprehension by his captains the German Fleet was twice to owe its triumphant escape.

Having regard to the moods and intentions of the two Commanders, to their respective strategic problems, to their geographical position, to their relative speeds and to the three hours' daylight that alone remained when they met, it will be seen that the chances of a general fleet action being fought out on May 31 were remote.

* * * * *

The reader must now take his mental station on the bridge of the *Iron Duke* which all this time has been steaming forward leading the centre of the British battlefleet. Sir John Jellicoe has read every signal made by Admiral

With the
Iron Duke.

Beatty's light cruisers and battle-cruisers. He has therefore been able to follow on the chart the course of events from the first report of the suspicious vessels by the *Galatea* to the momentous announcement of Commodore Goodenough that the High Sea Fleet was in sight. The forces at his disposal are moving in a vast crescent. Its southern horn consists of Beatty's detached command, a fleet in itself. On the north or less-exposed flank is Admiral Hood with a force similar to, but smaller than Beatty's, and consisting of the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron with two light cruisers and destroyers. The immediate front of the battlefleet is screened by eight pre-Dreadnought armoured cruisers followed by four of the latest light cruisers (*Carolines*).

The Commander-in-Chief knows that all his powerful advanced scouting forces of the southern flank are engaged and that a heavy battle-cruiser action has been in progress for nearly two hours. From the first moment of the alarm he has been working his fleet up to its highest combined speed, and the whole of his twenty-four battleships¹ are now steaming at 20 knots. As soon as he heard that the German battle-cruisers were at sea, he had ordered Admiral Hood with the *Invincibles* and other vessels to reinforce Beatty. He finds time to telegraph to the Admiralty the solemn message, 'Fleet action imminent'; and far away around the indented coasts of Britain arsenals, dockyards, hospitals spring into a long-prepared intense activity.

The task is now the deployment of the Fleet. And here, while the armadas are closing, we must step aside for a few moments from the narrative to enable the lay reader to appreciate some of the technical issues involved.

The evolutions of cavalry in the days of shock tactics and those of a modern fleet resemble each other. Both approach in column and fight in line; and cavalry and fleet drill consist primarily in swift and well-executed changes from one formation to the other. The Grand Fleet was now advancing in a mass of six columns of four ships, each column a mile apart. The Fleet Flagship, the *Iron*

¹ These with the four *Queen Elizabeths* made up his twenty-eight.

Duke, led the fourth column from the right. Although the breadth of this array was over ten thousand yards, it was completely under the control of the Commander-in-Chief.¹ His ideal at the moment of contact would be to meet the enemy's fleet in front of him, and he could for this purpose use his power of changing direction within certain limits, exactly as a skilful rider sets his horse squarely at a fence. But though the mass formation is so handy for approach or manœuvre, it is, alike to a cavalry division or a great fleet, fatal to be caught in such order by an enemy who has already deployed into line.

Method of
Deployment.

Before the British battlefleet could fight, it must deploy into line. The nearer the Commander-in-Chief could bring his fleet to the enemy in mass, the more certain he would be of being able to lead it squarely in the right direction; but the longer he waited and the nearer he got before deploying, the greater his risk of being caught at a terrible disadvantage. It is a task, like the landing of an aeroplane, of choosing the right moment between two opposite sets of dangers. If the Commander-in-Chief has been skilful or lucky in guiding his mass of battleships in the true direction of the enemy's fleet and finds them exactly ahead of him, his deployment will be swift and easy. He has only to turn the leading ships of his columns to the right or to the left as the case may be, and the whole fleet in four minutes will draw up in one long line of battle, firing at its fullest strength. If, however, owing to facts beyond human control or judgment, he has not been able to point his mass in exactly the right direction, or if he is still uncertain as to the true position of the enemy, he has an alternative method of deployment. He can make either of his flank columns steam onwards and the others follow in succession until the long single file which constitutes the line of battle is fully formed. This second method has the advantage of being much more likely to fit an unexpected situation. The moment the enemy appears out of the horizon the leading ship of either flank division can be ordered to take up any course which is in good relation

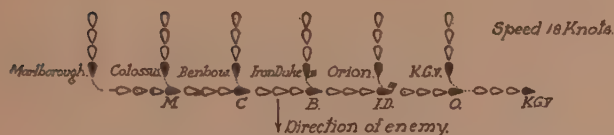
¹ The diagrams on page 141 will show some of the many evolutions which are possible from this formation.

Vital Information.

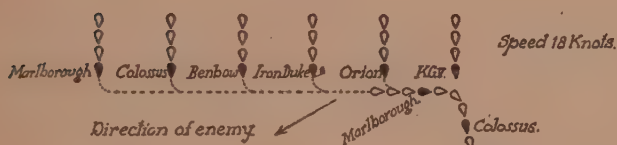
to the hostile line, and all the other ships will follow it in succession. But whereas to deploy into line by the first method would take the British Grand Fleet of that day only four minutes, the deployment in the wake of one of the flank columns, or as it is called 'deployment on the wing,' requires twenty-two minutes before its full fire can be developed. Meanwhile the whole of the enemy's fleet might be in action with only such a portion of ours as had drawn out into line of battle.

To deploy correctly, accurate and instantaneous information of the position of the hostile fleet is all-important. For this reason the Commander-in-Chief is protected by cruisers and light cruisers under his direct control, who strive to watch the enemy's fleet continuously and tell him every few minutes where it is going and how it is formed. In the quarter of an hour which precedes the moment of deployment these scouts, or several of them, ought to be both in sight of the enemy and of their own flagship. Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge. Nothing ought to be trusted at such a crisis except direct visual signalling by searchlight flashes. This is almost like men speaking to each other. To trust in so cardinal a matter to the wireless reports of cruisers which are out of sight is to run a needless risk. Such reports are highly important and may sometimes disclose the exact situation. But if ever certainty is required, it is at the moment of fleet deployment; and certainty cannot be obtained from cruisers which are beyond the Commander-in-Chief's sight or not linked visually to vessels which he can see.

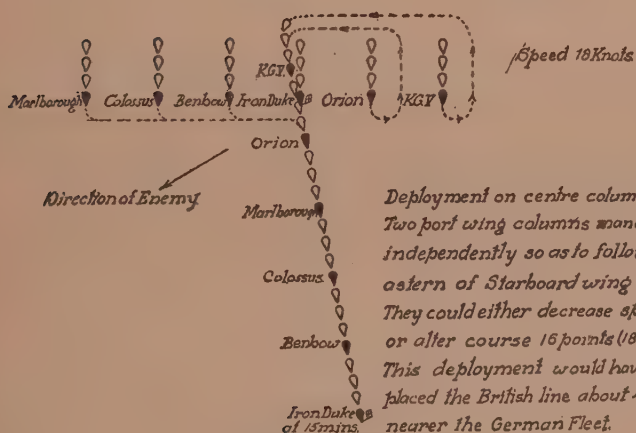
Both the Fleets and all the cruisers are moving fast and momentarily altering their whole relation to one another. The cruisers which are out of sight are very likely in heavy action, clinging on to the hostile fleet, zigzagging and turning suddenly to avoid gunfire or torpedo. They are sure to be out of their reckoning. Their reports have to be written, ciphered, dispatched, received, decoded before they reach the Commander-in-Chief. Ten minutes easily elapse in this process; and there are not ten minutes to spare. Moreover, the reports from different scouting ships may not agree. Three or four different versions may

DEPLOYMENT DIAGRAMS.

Equal Speed deployment by a simultaneous turn of leaders of columns 8 points (90°). Time taken 4 minutes. Applicable if the enemy is right ahead of centre column and deploys in the same direction.

FIG. 1

Equal speed deployment as carried out at Jutland. Time taken 22½ mins. Enemy bearing 60° on Starboard bow of Iron Duke 7 Miles.

FIG. 2.

Deployment on centre column. Two port wing columns manoeuvre independently so as to follow astern of Starboard wing column. They could either decrease speed or alter course 16 points (180°). This deployment would have placed the British line about 4000' nearer the German Fleet.

FIG. 3

Scouting
Cruisers.

simultaneously reach the Commander-in-Chief, and not one of them will be absolutely accurate. Therefore the fateful act of deployment should invariably be founded upon the visual signal of a scout who is actually in sight of the enemy's fleet. The only sure method of knowing exactly where the hostile fleet is at the moment of deployment is the primitive plan of having light cruisers of your own which you can see and which can themselves see the enemy and each other. Such a network of lines of sight alone ensures exact knowledge of a vital matter.

The duty of clinging to the German High Sea Fleet and continually reporting its whereabouts by wireless which could be read simultaneously by Beatty and by Jellicoe belonged in the first instance to the light cruisers of Beatty's scouting force; and admirably did Commodore Goodenough and his squadron discharge it. There is no ground for criticizing the *Lion* for not transmitting signals from the light cruisers while in heavy action herself. The *Iron Duke* read simultaneously everything that passed by wireless. But signals from light cruisers sixty, fifty, forty or even thirty miles away proved to be conflicting and erroneous. We now know that Goodenough was four miles out of his reckoning, and the *Iron Duke* was more than six. Reports from any of Beatty's vessels, all of which were out of sight and beyond the horizon, were an invaluable means by which Jellicoe could learn the general course of events and approach of the enemy. But they were not, and ought never to have been relied on as, a substitute for the reports of scouting cruisers of his own.

Nor was the Commander-in-Chief unprovided with the necessary vessels. Apart from the fourteen light cruisers detached with Beatty's advance force, Jellicoe had reserved for his own special use four of the very latest 'Caroline' class of light cruiser. He had besides the eight armoured cruisers of the pre-Dreadnought era (*Defence*, *Warrior*, etc.). At the first alarm he had ordered these old vessels to increase to full speed and cover his front; but as they could not steam more than twenty knots and he was himself making eighteen and rising to twenty, they did not appreciably draw ahead of him in these important two hours. The

Carolines, however, were designed for twenty-nine knots. Knowing that Beatty's force was committed to battle beyond the horizon, the Commander-in-Chief would have been prudent to use his four *Carolines* for the sole purpose of securing him early and exact information on which to base his deployment. His own battle orders declared that with less than 12 miles' visibility references to the enemy's latitude and longitude were quite useless, and emphasized the extreme importance of maintaining visual touch by means of linking cruisers. The Meeting.

In two hours the *Carolines* in a fan-shaped formation could have easily gained fifteen miles upon the *Iron Duke* in the general direction of the enemy. They would then have been in sight of the British armoured cruisers, which were themselves fully visible from the Grand Fleet. The *Carolines* themselves at this time could see at least seven miles. Thus the Commander-in-Chief could, had he so wished, have had more than twenty miles' accurate notice by visual signal of the position and line of advance of the German Fleet. This would have been an additional precaution to enable him to bring his fleet safely in mass formation to the exact position from which he could deploy on to the right course of battle by the four-minute method.

* * * * *

All the ships in both the Fleets were in the half-hour preceding the British deployment drawing together into a tremendous concourse. In that period the following principal events were taking place for the most part simultaneously. Beatty's battle-cruisers, with the 5th Battle Squadron behind them, were hurrying northward to make contact with, and draw the enemy on to, the Grand Fleet. Hipper and Rear-Admiral Boedicker, with the German 1st and 2nd Scouting Groups, were also running north, covering the advance of the German High Sea Fleet. Beatty and Hipper were engaging each other on roughly parallel courses, and the 5th Battle Squadron was in heavy action with the leading German battleships as well as with Hipper's battle-cruisers. Meanwhile Admiral Hood in the *Invincible*, with the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron, and preceded by the light cruisers *Chester* and *Canterbury*, was

Admiral
Hood in
Action.

advancing on the northern flank of the British array. Thus at about 5.40 both German Scouting Groups were plunging into the centre of the British crescent (it had now become a horseshoe), of which the southern horn (Beatty) was rapidly retiring and the northern horn (Hood) was rapidly advancing.

Hipper with the 1st Scouting Group was in renewed action to the south-west, when at 5.36 the *Chester*, reconnoitring for Admiral Hood, encountered the German 2nd Scouting Group. At 5.40 three of the four light cruisers of which it consisted emerged swiftly from the haze, and the *Chester* was 'almost immediately smothered in a hail of fire.'¹ Nearly all her guns were broken up, and her deck became a shambles. But the centre of the British crescent was also in rapid advance; and at 5.47 the *Defence* (Flagship of Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot) and the *Warrior*, the centre ships of the line of armoured cruisers directly covering the advance of the Grand Fleet, sighted the 2nd Scouting Group from the opposite direction and opened a heavy fire upon them. Boedicker's light cruisers, glad to pursue the stricken *Chester*, turned away from the fire of these powerful though middle-aged vessels, only to meet a far more formidable antagonist.

Admiral Hood with his three battle-cruisers, swinging round towards the cannonade, came rushing out of the mist, and at 5.55 fell upon the German light cruisers with his 12-inch guns, crippling the *Wiesbaden* and badly damaging the *Pillau* and the *Frankfort* in a few minutes. The apparition of capital ships to the northward 'fell on Admiral Boedicker like a thunderbolt.'² From far in his rear came the reverberation of Beatty's cruiser action. This new antagonist must be the head of the main British Fleet. Boedicker instantly turned to escape from the closing jaws, leaving the wounded *Wiesbaden* to crawl out of danger as fast as she could. The explosion of Hood's guns carried—as will be seen—a similar warning to Hipper.

Meanwhile Arbuthnot in the *Defence*, followed by the *Warrior*, was pursuing the 2nd Scouting Group. He found the *Wiesbaden* dragging herself away. Determined to destroy her, he 'came rushing down on her at full speed.'³

¹ Official Narrative, p. 36.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ *Ibid.*

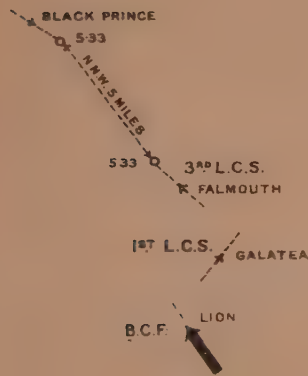
COCHRANE

THE MEETING 5:30 P.M.



WARRIOR
DEFENCE
(SIR ROBERT ARBUTHNOT)

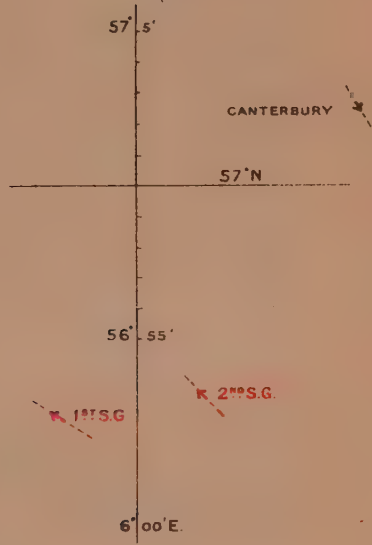
DUKE OF
EDINBURGH



5TH B.S.
2ND L.C.S.
BARHAM
SOUTHAMPTON
(GOODENOUGH)



3RD B.C.S.
(INVINCIBLE)
ARD HOOD
CHESTER



- 5TH DIVISION
KÖNIG
- 6TH DIVISION
- 1ST DIVISION
- 2ND DIVISION
- 3RD DIVISION
- 4TH DIVISION

The *Lion*, heading the British battle-cruisers again in action with Hipper, had also converged. Arbuthnot in impetuous ardour pressed across her bows, forcing her off her course, throwing out the fire of her squadron and blanketing their target with his funnel smoke. He was within 6,000 yards of the *Wiesbaden*, and had turned to starboard to bring his whole broadside to bear, when the again advancing Hipper swung his guns upon him, as did some of the German battleships now also coming into range. In a moment the *Defence*, struck by a succession of shells from the heaviest guns, blew up in a terrific explosion and at 6.19 p.m. vanished with nearly 800 men in a huge pillar of smoke. The *Warrior*, grievously smitten, seemed about to share her fate. But meanwhile greater events were happening. The Grand Fleet's deployment had begun at 6.15.

The *Defence*
sunk.

During these events the run to the north had come to an end. At 5.25 Beatty had resumed his action with Hipper. The light was now favourable to the British. The 15-inch guns of the *Barham* and the *Valiant* were also firing upon the German battle-cruisers, who began to suffer severely. In the midst of this, at 5.42, came the sound of the *Invincible's* guns attacking the 2nd Scouting Group to the north-eastward; and thereupon, having good reason to feel himself being surrounded by superior forces as well as being mastered in the actual fire-fight, Hipper turned his ships swiftly about and fell back on the High Sea Fleet. As his opponent turned away to starboard Beatty first conformed, then curled round him due east in the natural movement of the action, and also with the object of preventing Hipper, however he might turn, from discovering the British battlefleet. It was at this moment that the *Lion* came in sight of the *Iron Duke*. Her appearance was a surprise to Jellicoe. The reckoning from Beatty's wireless signals had led the *Iron Duke* to expect him a good deal farther to the eastward. The cumulative error of the two ships was no less than eleven miles. Fact now instantaneously superseded estimate. There was the *Lion* six miles away and nearly four points more to starboard of the *Iron Duke* than had been supposed. It was reasonable to assume that the enemy's battlefleet was also

Need to
Deploy the
Fleet.

and to an equal degree more to the westward; and this meant that Jellicoe would not meet them ahead, or nearly ahead, but obliquely on the starboard bow.

The situation was critical, urgent and obscure. The Commander-in-Chief could feel the enemy's breath all round his right cheek and shoulder, and he now evidently wanted very much to point his fleet to the new direction. But this partial wheel¹ required fifteen minutes, and he had not got them. As soon as he saw Beatty steaming across his bows in action and at full speed, he flashed the question: 'Where is the enemy's battlefleet?' (6.01). And a minute later, in consequence of Beatty's appearance and position, and not having time to wheel, he turned the leading ships of his divisions southward to improve his line of approach to the enemy by gaining ground in that direction. This movement lost no time and was absolutely right in conception, but it brought his fleet into an échelon formation of divisions which was not at all convenient for deployment, and the German fleet might be very near. At any minute it might emerge from the mist six or seven miles away, and forthwith open fire. And at 6.06 the Commander-in-Chief reverted to his previous formation, which though not pointing true still gave him the largest options for deployment.

Meanwhile Beatty, now only two miles ahead of the *Marlborough* (the right-hand corner vessel of the battleship mass), answered: 'Enemy's battle-cruisers bearing south-east.'² On which the Commander-in-Chief repeated, 'Where is the enemy's battlefleet?' To this the *Lion* could give no answer. Hipper had for the moment vanished, and the *Lion* had no enemy in sight.

Anxiously peering at the menacing curtains of the horizon or poring over the contradictions and obscurities of the chart, Jellicoe held on his course in tense uncertainty for another eight minutes. Then at last came illumination. At 6.10 the *Barham* had sighted Scheer's battleships to the S.S.E., and as her wireless had been shot away, the

¹ The sailors call it for short 'altering the bearing of the guides by (so many) points.'

² Their course was omitted.

Valiant passed the news. Jellicoe received it at 6.14. Almost simultaneously the *Lion* reported the High Sea Fleet in sight S.S.W. These two reports placed the enemy four points on the starboard bow or, in military parlance, half right. The direction was correct. But the leading German battleship *König* was placed three miles nearer than she actually was. On this view further delay seemed impossible. The moment of decision had come. 'It became,' says the Admiralty Narrative, 'urgently necessary to deploy the Fleet.'

Jellicoe's
Decision.

The meeting having taken place at this unsatisfactory angle, a swift deployment of the Fleet by divisions to port or starboard was not open. It would have brought the Fleet into a line out of proper relation to the enemy's potential battle front. There remained only the twenty-two minutes' method of deployment on the wing. Jellicoe conceived himself limited to two alternatives: either he could let his right-hand column nearest the enemy go ahead and make the others follow it, or he could let his left-hand column farthest from the enemy take the lead. If he chose the former, he ran the risk of the enemy concentrating their fire on his leading ships while the rest of the Fleet could not reply. If he chose the latter, he drew out his line of battle 10,000 yards farther away from the enemy. Instead of deploying into action and opening fire at once, he would deploy outside effective gun range; and his opening movement in the battle would be a retirement.

Our present knowledge leads to the conclusion that he could have deployed on the starboard wing without misadventure. The 5th Battle Squadron, with its unequalled guns, armour and speed, was in fact about to take the van ahead of the *Marlborough's* division of older Dreadnoughts. Beatty's battle-cruisers were already ahead steaming upon the exact course. Still farther ahead in front of all Hood in lively comprehension was about to wheel into the line. The whole Fleet would have drawn out harmoniously into full battle at decisive ranges, with all its fast heavy ships at the right end of the line for cutting the enemy from his base. The Commander-in-Chief chose the safer course. No one can say that on the facts as known to

A Third
Course.

him at the moment it was a wrong decision. There are ample arguments on either side, and anyhow he was the man appointed to choose. If he had deployed on the wing towards the enemy, and if the leading British squadrons had been overwhelmed by the fire of the German battlefleet, or if a heavy torpedo attack had developed on the van of the Fleet and if our whole line had thereby been checked and disordered in its deployment, and four or five ships sunk (as might have happened in as many minutes), there would have been no lack of criticism upon the imprudence of the Admiral's decision. And criticism would have been the least of the consequences.

But there was surely a third course open to Sir John Jellicoe which had none of the disadvantages of these hard alternatives.¹ Although it involved a complicated evolution, it was in principle a very simple course. In fact it was the simplest and most primitive of all courses. He could have deployed on his centre and taken the lead himself. There is a very old and well-known signal in the Royal Navy which would have enabled the Commander-in-Chief to lead his own division out of the mass and make the others follow after him in any sequence he might choose. It was only necessary to hoist the pennant 'A' above a succession of numerals indicating the order in which the various divisions should follow. It involved every ship in the two port divisions either reducing speed or making a complete left-handed circle to avoid losing speed, while the starboard divisions were taking their places behind the Commander-in-Chief. But the Fleet was not under fire, and the manœuvre was practical. It meant in short, 'Follow me.' Out of a tangle of uncertainties and out of a cruel dilemma here was a sure, prudent and glorious middle course. By adopting it Sir John Jellicoe would have retained the greatest measure of control over his Fleet after deployment. He would have had three miles and ten minutes more to spare than if he had deployed on the wing towards the enemy. He would have avoided any retirement from the advancing foe. He would have led his Fleet, and they would have followed him.

¹ See diagram on p. 141.

It may seem strange that he should have never attempted to deal with this alternative in any of his accounts and explanations of his actions. It is perhaps easily explained. Sir John Jellicoe was working on a definite preconceived system. In the thunder and mystery of the preliminaries of what might be the greatest sea battle of the world, he held as long as he could rigidly to his rules. All his dispositions for battle had contemplated a deployment either on the port or starboard column of battleships. As a consequence the routine system of signals in the Grand Fleet battle orders did not contemplate any such deployment on the Admiral's flag. The old signal was well known. If hoisted, it would have been instantly comprehended. But it had fallen into desuetude, and it never seems to have occurred to the Commander-in-Chief at the time.

Neglect of
the *Queen*
Elizabeths.

Equally it did not occur to him to take an obvious precaution against the escape of the enemy which could not have risked the safety of his Fleet. His cautious deployment on the outer wing made it the more imperative to make sure the enemy was brought to battle. To do this he had only to tell the four *Queen Elizabeths* of the 5th Battle Squadron, instead of falling tamely in at the tail of the line and thus wasting all their unique combination of speed and power, to attack separately the disengaged side of the enemy. These ships would not have been in any danger of being overwhelmed by the numbers of the enemy. They were eight or nine knots faster than Scheer's Fleet as long as it remained united. They could at any moment, if too hard pressed, break off the action. Thus assured, what could be easier than for them to swoop round upon the old *Deutschland* squadron and cripple or destroy two or three of these ships in a few minutes? It would have been almost obligatory for Scheer to stop and rescue them; and taken between two fires, he would have been irrevocably committed to battle. This was exactly the kind of situation for which the division of fast super-Dreadnoughts, combining speed, guns and armour in an equal degree, had been constructed at such huge expense and trouble as one of the main acts of my administration

Progress of
the Deploy-
ment.

of the Admiralty. But neither the Commander-in-Chief nor their own Admiral could think of any better use for them than to let them steam uselessly along in rear of the Fleet at seventeen knots, their own speed being over twenty-four.

Therefore at 6.15 p.m. precisely the order was given by signal and wireless to deploy on the port wing. The fateful flags fluttered in the breeze, and were hauled down. The order became operative, and five-sixths of the immense line of British battleships turned away and began to increase their distance from the enemy. The first move of the Battle Fleet at Jutland had been made.

* * * * *

Both Beatty and the 5th Battle Squadron had been conveniently placed for a deployment on the starboard wing. The deployment to port forced Beatty to steam at full speed across the front of the line of battle in order to take his position in the van. Hood wheeled into the line ahead of Beatty. The smoke of the battle-cruisers obscured the vision of the battleships, and at 6.26 Jellicoe reduced the Fleet speed to fourteen knots in order to let the battle-cruisers draw ahead. The signal did not get through quickly, and bunching and overlapping began to occur, particularly at the turning-point. The 5th Battle Squadron, too far behind to cross the front of Jellicoe's deployment and receiving no orders to act independently, decided to take station in rear, and executed a left-handed turn under the concentrated fire both of the German battle-cruisers and the leading German battleships. Once more the 15-inch guns and 13-inch armour of the fast battleships came into heavy action against greatly superior forces, and ponderous blows were given and received. The *Warspite*, with her helm temporarily jammed, fell out of the squadron and made a sweeping circle out of control and under intense fire. The circle carried her round the half-wrecked *Warrior*, who in the confusion, blessing her saviour's involuntary chivalry, struggled into safety.

At 6.25, while the deployment was proceeding, the Fleet began to fire, about one-third of the ships finding targets either on the unfortunate *Wiesbaden*, which lay between

THE DEPLOYMENT

6 19 P.M.

SCALE

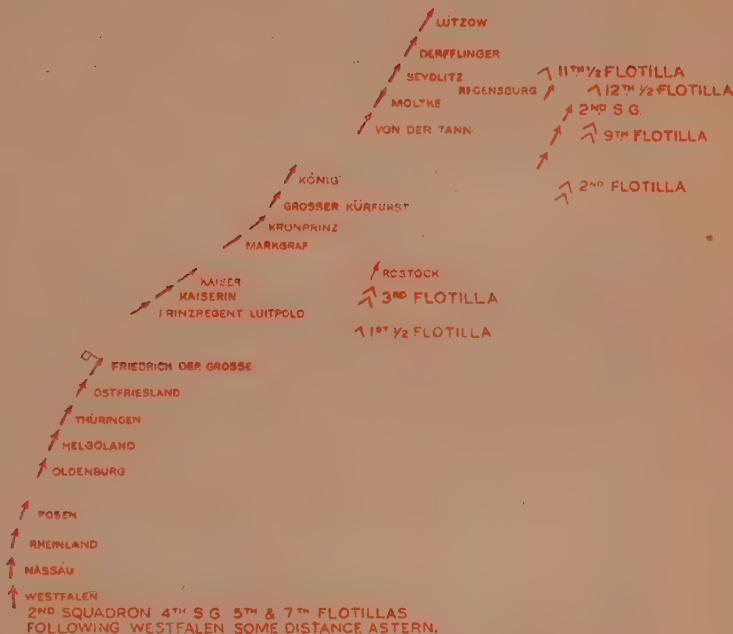
CABLES 10 0 1 2 3 4 5 SEA MILES.



OWIESBADEN
(DISABLED)

ACASTA

SHARK (SINKING)



the lines a flaming wreck, or on the German 3rd Squadron (*Königs*) at the head of the hostile fleet. The range was fouled by smoke, and the visibility poor. But Jellicoe's manœuvre had procured the most favourable light for the British, and only the flashes of their guns could be seen by the enemy. When half the Fleet had turned the corner, Jellicoe seems to have thought of coming to closer quarters by altering course by sub-divisions towards the enemy. The L-shape in which the Fleet was then formed probably made him feel that this movement was impracticable, and the signal was cancelled before it was begun. Half the British Fleet was firing by the time the deployment was completed (6.47 p.m.); and the German 3rd Squadron was repeatedly hit, no British battleship being touched in return.

Destruction
of the
Invincible.
Scheer turns
away.

Meanwhile Hood with the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron had been engaging Hipper's battle-cruisers with good effect. But at 6.31 a salvo from the *Derfflinger* smote the *Invincible*. In the words of the Official Narrative,

'Several big explosions took place in rapid succession; masses of coal dust issued from the riven hull; great tongues of flame played over the ship; the masts collapsed; the ship broke in two, and an enormous pall of black smoke ascended to the sky. As it cleared away the bow and stern could be seen standing up out of the water as if to mark the place where an Admiral lay.'¹

Of her crew of 1,026 officers and men, six only survived.

We will now follow for a moment the German movements. Scheer found himself under fire from the British line of battle from 6.25 onwards. He mistook Hood's battle-cruisers for the van of the British line. He thus thought himself about to be enveloped. Instead of executing upon the British the manœuvre of 'crossing the T,' it seemed that they were about to do this to him. He therefore at 6.35, with the utmost promptitude, turned his whole Fleet about, every ship turning simultaneously, and made off to the westward, *towards England*, launching at the same time a flotilla to cover his retirement by a torpedo attack and smoke screens. This thoroughly practised evolution was

¹ pp. 49-50.

The Second
Oppor-
tunity.

performed with success and even precision, in spite of the pressure and disarray of battle. Jellicoe, threatened by the torpedo stream, turned away according to his long-resolved policy. The fleets fell rapidly apart, the Germans faded into a bank of mist, and Scheer found himself alone again.

But now ensued one of those astounding events utterly outside the bounds of reasonable expectation, which have often been the turning-points of history. No sooner did Scheer, after steaming for about twenty minutes to the westward, find himself free, than he turned each ship about right-handed and again steamed eastward. What was his purpose? After getting back to harbour he declared that it was to seek further conflict with the British Fleet. 'When I noticed that the British pressure had quite ceased and that the fleet remained intact in my hands, I turned back under the impression that the action could not end in this way, and that I ought to seek contact with the enemy again.'¹ This explanation is endorsed by the German official history. Nevertheless it seems more likely that he calculated that this movement would carry him across the British rear, and that he hoped to pass astern punishing the rear ships and getting again on the homeward side of the battle. We know that he was under the impression that the British battle-cruisers were the van of the British line of battle. From this the conclusion inevitably presented to his mind would be that the British battlefleet was five miles ahead of its position. On these assumptions his movement would have carried him very nicely across the British tail. Instead of this he ran right into the centre of the whole British fleet, which was certainly the last thing he sought. This mistake might well have been fatal to the Germans. It would have been impossible to have chosen a situation of greater peril. Jellicoe's fleet was also no doubt somewhat inconveniently arranged. He was steaming south with his divisions in échelon. In fact he now, at 7.12 p.m., was caught by the Germans while he was in the very posture he had so disliked before his original deployment. But nevertheless in practice no serious difficulty arose. As the

¹ Official Narrative.

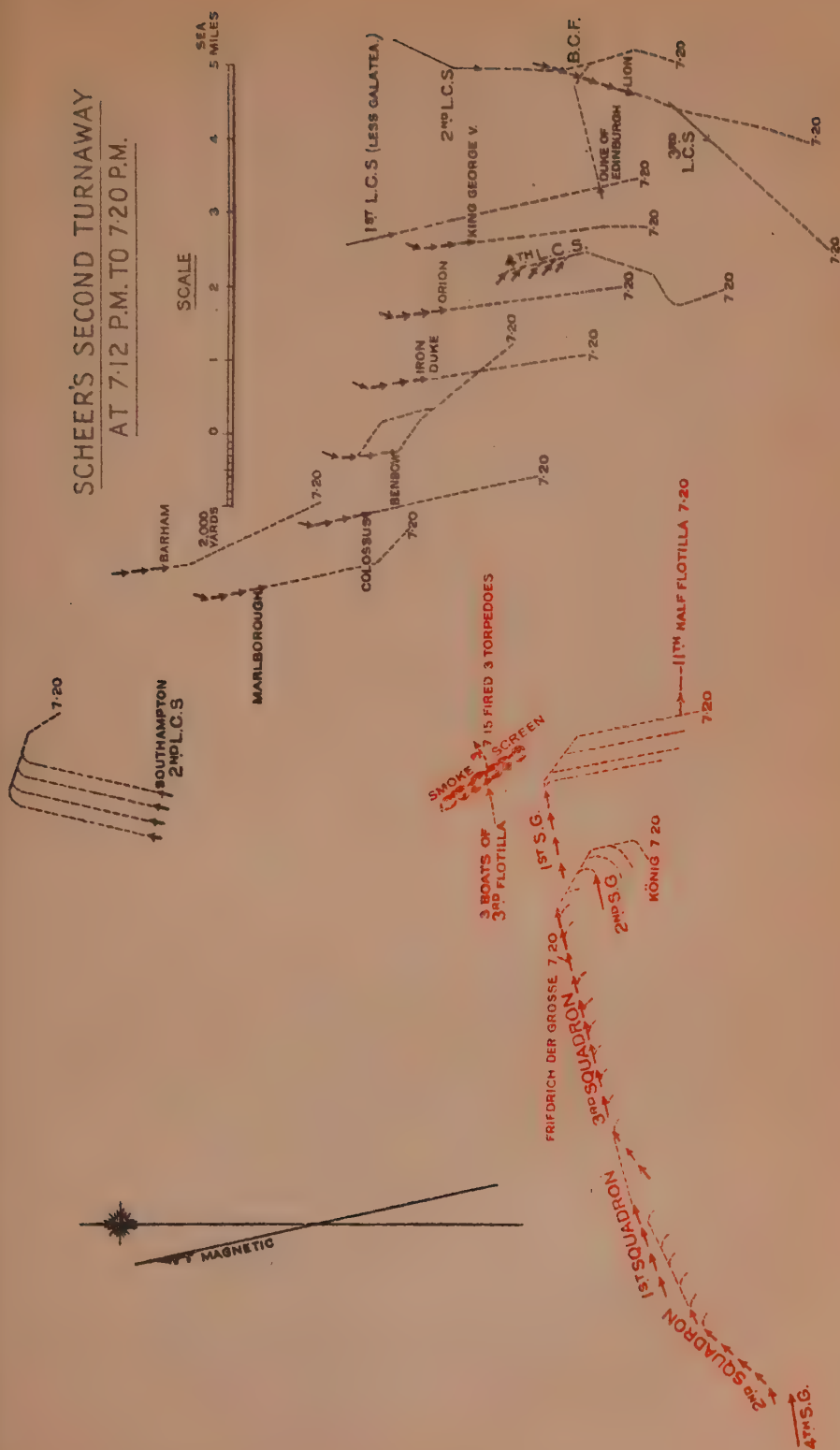
SCHEER'S FIRST TURN AWAY

6:35 P.M.

YARDS 2000 0 1 2 3 4 5 SEA MILES.



SCHEER'S SECOND TURNAWAY AT 7:12 P.M. TO 7:20 P.M.



German ships one after another emerged from the mist, all the British battleships whose range was clear opened a terrific fire upon them. The German van, the formidable *Königs*, saw the whole horizon as far as eye could reach alive with flashes. About six minutes' intense firing ensued. The concussion of the shell storm burst upon the German vessels. Hipper's long-battered but redoubtable scouting group once more bore the brunt. The *Seydlitz* burst into flames; the *Lützow* reeled out of the line. This was the heaviest cannonade ever fired at sea.

Scheer turns away again.

It did not last long. The moment Scheer realized what he had run into, he repeated—though less coolly—the manœuvre he had used at 6.35; and at 7.17 he again turned the battlefleet about to the westward, launched another series of flotilla attacks, threw up more smoke screens, ordered the gasping battle-cruisers to attack at all costs to cover his retreat (a 'Death ride'), and sped again to the west. Once more Jellicoe, obedient to his method, turned away from the torpedo stream, first two points and then two points more. Here at any rate was a moment when, as a glance at the map will show, it would have been quite easy to divide the British Fleet with the 5th Battle Squadron leading the starboard division, and so take the enemy between two fires. But the British Commander-in-Chief was absorbed in avoiding the torpedo attack by turning away. The range opened, the Fleets separated, and Scheer vanished again from Jellicoe's view—this time for ever.

Between 6.0 and 7.30 the German flotillas had delivered no fewer than seven attacks upon the British battlefleet. The true answer to these attacks was the counter-attack of the British flotillas and Light Cruiser Squadrons, of which latter two were available and close at hand. These should have been ordered to advance and break up the enemy's torpedo craft, as they were fully capable of doing. Instead of using this aggressive parry, Jellicoe turned his battleships away on each occasion; and contact with the enemy ceased. The German flotillas in the whole of this phase lost only a single boat, but they effectively secured the safe withdrawal of their Fleet from the jaws of death.

Beatty however still sought to renew the action. It was

Beatty
renews the
Action.

above all things important to drive the Germans westward away from home. The *Lion* was in sight of the enemy; but the British battlefleet was drawing no nearer to her, and it was not possible for the battle-cruisers to engage Scheer single-handed. At 7.45 he signalled the bearing of the enemy through the *Minotaur* to the leading British battleship; and at 7.47 sent the much-discussed message to the Commander-in-Chief, 'Submit that the van of the battleships follow me; we can then cut off the enemy's fleet.' Almost immediately thereafter he altered course to close the enemy. Meanwhile Scheer homeward bent had gradually brought the High Sea Fleet from a westerly on to a southerly course. The fleets were once again converging. Light cruisers and destroyers on both sides began to fire. The British battle-cruisers would soon be engaged. Where was the van of our Battle Fleet? A quarter of an hour was allowed to pass after Jellicoe received Beatty's signal before he sent the necessary order—and that in no urgent terms—to the 2nd Battle Squadron. Vice-Admiral Jerram commanding that squadron did not increase his speed, did not draw ahead of the main fleet, and did not ask the *Minotaur* for the *Lion's* position. He merely held on his course, in much uncertainty of the general situation. Thus the *Lion* and her consorts were alone in the last as in the first encounter of great ships at Jutland and in the war. The German battle-cruisers, grievously wounded, were scarcely in a condition to fight, and the light was still favourable to the British. Firing began from the *Tiger* on different ships at ranges from 9,000 to 13,000 yards. One of the two remaining turrets of the *Derfflinger* was put out of action. The *Seydlitz* and *Lützow* could scarcely fire a shot. Suddenly the old Deutschland battleships came to the rescue of Hipper's gallant battered vessels; and the last salvoes of the big guns were exchanged with them in the twilight. After 15 minutes the Germans turned off again to the westward and disappeared in the gathering gloom.

* * * * *

Night had now come on, and by nine o'clock darkness had fallen on the sea. Thereupon the conditions of naval warfare underwent profound changes. The rights

DARKNESS FALLS AT 9:00 P.M.



2ND L.C.S.

5TH B.S.

MARLBOROUGH

KÖNIG

3RD SQUADRON

P. LUITPOLD

1ST S.G.
DENFFLINGER

FRIEDRICH DER
GROSSE

1ST SQUADRON

WESTFALEN

2ND SQUADRON

SCHLESWIG HOLSTEIN

4TH S.G.

2ND C.S.

LION

3RD L.C.S.

1ST L.C.S.

COLOSSUS

BENBOW

CONSTANCE
IRON DUKE

ORION

KING GEORGE V

ROYALIST
CAROLINE

CALLIOPE

COMUS



of the stronger fleet faded into a grey equality. The far-ranging cruisers were blinded. The friendly destroyers became a danger to the ships they guarded. The great guns lost their range. Now, if ever, the reign of the torpedo would begin. The rival Navies, no more than six miles apart, steamed onwards through the darkness, silent and invisible, able to turn about in five minutes or less in any direction, no man knowing what the other would do or what might happen next.

Darkness
falls.

But Admiral Scheer had made up his mind, and his course, though perilous, was plain. He was a man of resolution based on reasoned judgment. He knew that a superior hostile fleet lay between him and home. To be found in that position by the light of another day meant, in all probability, total destruction. The night was short. At half-past two dawn would be breaking. He must act without a moment's delay. His plan was simple: to go home as fast as possible by the shortest route, at all risks and at all costs. If he found the British Fleet in his path, he would crash through it. Many ships would be sunk on both sides, but the bulk of the German Navy would escape to harbour. Anything was better than being caught at sea by an overwhelming force with eighteen hours of battle light before it. At 9.14 he issued the following order by wireless: 'Our own main body is to proceed in. Maintain course S.S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ E.; speed 16 knots.' Accordingly the High Seas Fleet turned from its southerly course, and preceded by its flotillas and light cruiser squadrons, steamed at its fastest united speed straight for the Horn Reef. No one can doubt that he acted rightly.

Sir John Jellicoe's problem was more complicated. He now had the enemy in a position which certainly was no part of any prearranged German plan. He rightly rejected the idea of a night action. Any battle brought on at day-break would be free from all apprehensions of traps or elaborately prepared ambuscades. It would be a straightforward fight to a finish in blue water; and he was more than twice as strong. His obvious and supreme duty was to compel such a battle. But how?

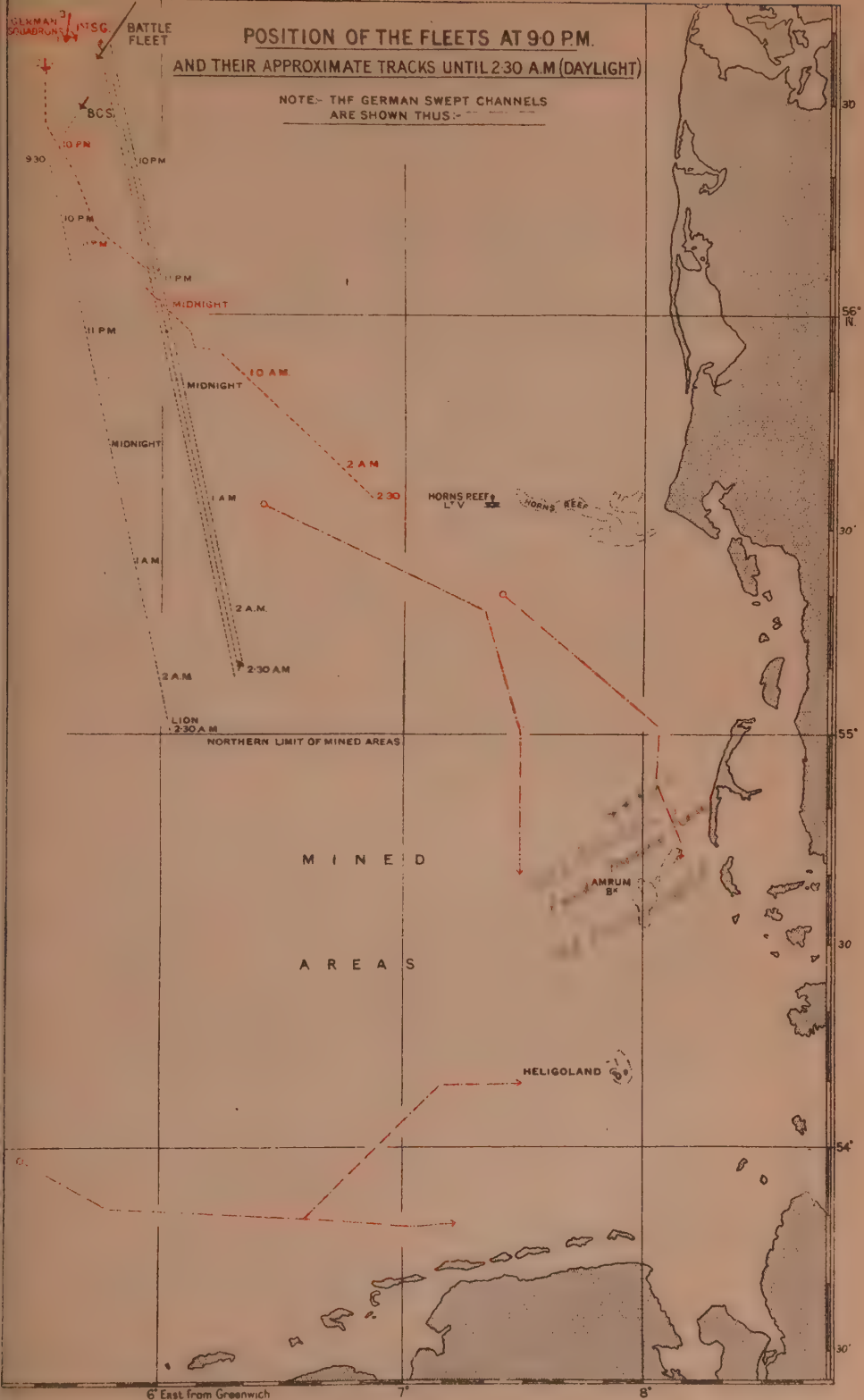
Two minefields had been laid in the Heligoland Bight

Jellicoe's
Problem.

since the beginning of the war by the Germans to impede an attack by the British Fleet. The Germans had been aided in this task, for reasons requiring more explanation, by the British Admiralty; and in consequence of the exertions of both sides large parts of the Bight were closed by British and German mines. Through these the Germans had swept three broad channels: one to the north by the Horn Reef, one rather more in the centre by Heligoland, and one to the south by the Ems River. Both sides knew a great deal about each other's minefields. They were marked on their charts as clearly as rocks or shoals, and could be avoided with almost equal certainty. But the British Admiralty knew not only the minefields, but all the three German channels through them. Sir John Jellicoe therefore had on his chart all the three passages open to Admiral Scheer marked out before him.

There was also a fourth alternative. Scheer might avoid the Heligoland Bight altogether, and turning northward as soon as darkness fell, steer homewards through the Kattegat and into the Baltic. Which of these four would he choose? No one in the position of the British Commander-in-Chief could expect to achieve certainty. Whatever decision Jellicoe had taken must have left a number of chances unguarded. All that could be expected of him was to act in accordance with reasonable probability, and leave the rest to Fate. The final question which this chapter must examine is whether he acted upon reasonable probability or not.

It was possible immediately to eliminate the least likely alternatives open to the enemy. Retreat into the Baltic by the Kattegat gave Scheer no security against being brought to battle in daylight. It involved a voyage of nearly 350 miles, giving the faster British a long day to chase in the open sea. Jellicoe could have provided for this route by the simple process (which he did not however adopt) of sending a few light cruisers to watch the area, and thus ensure timely information at dawn. The Ems route, which was long and roundabout, might also have been dismissed as improbable. Thus the four alternatives could have been reduced to two, i.e. the Horn Reef channel and the Heligo-



**POSITION OF THE FLEETS AT 9:30 P.M.
AND THEIR APPROXIMATE TRACKS UNTIL 2:30 A.M. (DAYLIGHT)**

NOTE:- THE GERMAN SWEEP CHANNELS
ARE SHOWN THUS:-

M I N E D
A R E A S

NORTHERN LIMIT OF MINED AREAS

6° East from Greenwich

7°

8°

30'

56° N

30'

55°

30'

54°

30'

land channel; and these two were not far apart. Sir John Jellicoe would have been justified in considering both the Horn Reef and Heligoland channels as open and likely. On this dual basis however a good movement presented itself. By steering for a point about ten miles to the south-westward of the Horn Reef light he would have been at daybreak in a favourable position to bring Scheer to battle whether he made for the Horn Reef or Heligoland channel. The British Fleet was at least three knots faster than the Germans and was nearer this point when darkness fell.

The Balance
of Prob-
ability.

But Jellicoe seems to have formed the opinion that the alternative lay between the Heligoland channel and the Ems, and he nowhere mentions the possibility of the Horn Reef which was *prima facie* the most likely. 'I was loth,' he says,¹ 'to forgo the advantage of position, which would have resulted from an easterly or westerly course,'² and I therefore decided to steer to the southward, where I should be in a position to renew the engagement at daylight, and should also be favourably placed to intercept the enemy should he make for his base by steering for Heligoland or towards the Ems and thence along the north German coast.' This was hardly the most reasonable assumption, and did not gather, but on the contrary excluded, the major favourable chances. To continue on such a course until dawn broke at 2.30 a.m. would carry the British Fleet 43 miles to the south-westward of Horn Reef and 25 miles to the westward of Scheer's direct course to Heligoland, thus failing to procure action in either case. Scheer was left free to retreat by the Horn Reef, Heligoland, or, if he chose, the Kattegat; and only the much less likely route by the Ems was barred.

At 9.1 p.m. the British battlefleet turned by divisions and proceeded almost due south at a speed of seventeen knots. At 9.17 p.m. it had assumed its night organization of three columns in close array, and at 9.27 p.m. the destroyer flotillas were told to take station 5 miles astern. This order served a double purpose. It freed the battlefleet during the darkness from the proximity of its own

¹ Commander-in-Chief's Despatches, Jutland Papers, p. 21.

² i.e., by his taking an easterly or westerly course.

The British
Flotillas.

flotillas, and thus enabled it to treat all torpedo craft as foes and sink at sight any that appeared. It also prolonged the British line and thereby increased the chances of intercepting the enemy. No orders to attack the enemy were however given to the flotillas, and they therefore steamed passively along their course without instructions or information. Jellicoe's signal to his flotillas was picked up by the German listening station at Neumünster, which reported to Scheer at 10.10 p.m., 'Destroyers have taken up position five sea miles astern of enemy's main fleet.' At about 10.50 p.m. the German 7th Flotilla reported that it had sighted British destroyers. Thus the German Admiral, if the Neumünster message reached him, had from this time forward a fairly clear idea of the relative positions of the two fleets.¹ Here ends the first phase of the night operations. The British Fleet is steaming southward at seventeen knots, and opening to the enemy every moment his two nearest and most likely lines of retreat. The Germans are making for the Horn Reef at sixteen knots, and are about to cut across Jellicoe's tail against which their destroyers have already brushed. There is still time to retrieve the situation.

At about 10.30 p.m. the 4th German Scouting Group came in contact with the British 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron which was following our battlefleet. There was a violent explosion of firing. The *Southampton* and the *Dublin* suffered heavy losses, and the old German cruiser *Frauenlob* was sunk by a torpedo. The gun flashes and searchlights of this encounter were noted in the log of nearly every vessel in the Grand Fleet. Firing in this quarter, though it was no proof, at least suggested that the enemy was seeking to pass astern of the British Fleet on the way to the Horn Reef. But confirmation of a decisive character was at hand.

Far away in Whitehall the Admiralty have been listening to the German wireless. They have heard and deciphered Admiral Scheer's order of 9.14 p.m. to the High Sea Fleet. At 10.41 the *Iron Duke*, and at about 11.30, after it had

¹ It is now said that he did not receive it till he got back to harbour.

been decoded, Sir John Jellicoe, received the following electrifying message: 'German battlefleet ordered home at 9.14 p.m. Battle-cruisers in rear. Course S.S.E. $\frac{3}{4}$ east. Speed 16 knots.'¹ If this message was to be trusted, it meant, and could only mean, that the Germans were returning by the Horn Reef. Taken in conjunction first with the general probabilities and secondly with the firing heard astern, the Admiralty message, unless wholly erroneous, amounted almost to certainty. Had Jellicoe decided to act upon it, he had only to turn his fleet on to a course parallel to the Germans in order to make sure of bringing them to battle at daybreak. By so doing he would neither have risked a night action nor increased the existing dangers of torpedo attack.

The Admiralty's
Decisive
Message.

But could the Admiralty message be trusted? Sir John Jellicoe thought not. He no doubt remembered that earlier in the day, a few minutes before the enemy's battle-cruisers were sighted, the same authoritative information had told him that the German High Sea Fleet was probably not at sea as its flagship was speaking from harbour. When Scheer's course as given by the Admiralty was plotted on the *Iron Duke's* chart, it appeared, owing to a minor error, to bring the Germans into almost exactly the position occupied by his own flagship at that moment. This was absurd. Moreover, he had received a report from the *Southampton* timed 10.15 which suggested that the enemy was still to the westward. Generally he considered the position was not clear. He therefore rejected the Admiralty information and continued to steam southward at seventeen knots.

It is difficult to feel that this decision was not contrary to the main weight of the evidence. Certain it is that if Sir John Jellicoe had acted in accordance with the Admiralty message, he would have had—even if that message had proved erroneous—a justification for his action which could never have been impugned. He was leaving so many favourable chances behind him as he sped to the south, and guarding against so few, that it is difficult to penetrate his mind. Full weight must, however, be assigned

¹ Official Narrative, p. 72.

Scheer's
Escape.

to the elements of doubt and contradiction which have been described.

At 11.30 the High Sea Fleet, after some minor alterations in course, crashed into the 4th British Flotilla, and a fierce brief conflict followed. The destroyers *Tipperary* and *Broke* were disabled. The *Spitfire* collided with the battleship *Nassau*, and the *Sparrowhawk* collided with the injured *Broke*. The German cruiser *Elbing* was rammed and disabled by the *Posen*. The *Rostock* was torpedoed. The rest of the British flotilla made off into the night, and turning again on their course, ran a second time into the enemy, when the destroyers *Fortune* and *Ardent* were both sunk by gunfire. A little after midnight the armoured cruiser *Black Prince*, which had become detached from the Fleet and was endeavouring to rejoin, found herself within 1,600 yards of the German super-Dreadnought Squadron, and was instantly blown to pieces; and her crew of 750 men perished without survivors. At 12.25 the head of the German line, which was by now on the port quarter of the British Fleet, cut into the 9th, 10th and 13th British Flotillas and sank the destroyer *Turbulent*. In these unexpected clashes the British flotillas following dutifully in the wake of the Grand Fleet suffered as severely as if they had been launched in an actual attack. The last contact was at 2.10, when the 12th Flotilla sighting the enemy who had now worked right round to port, and led by Captain Stirling with an aggressive intention and definite plan of attack, destroyed the *Pommern* with her entire crew of 700 men, and sank the German destroyer V 4. This was the end of the fighting.

Up till half an hour after midnight there was still time for Jellicoe to reach the Horn Reef in time for a daylight battle. Even after that hour the German rear and stragglers could have been cut off. The repeated bursts of heavy firing, the flash of great explosions, the beams of searchlights—all taking place in succession from west to east—was not readily capable of more than one interpretation. But the Grand Fleet continued steadily on its course to the south; and when it turned northward at 2.30 a.m., the Germans were for ever beyond its reach. The Northern

course also carried the British Fleet away from the retreating enemy; and it is clear that from this time onward the Commander-in-Chief had definitely abandoned all expectation of renewing the action. It remained only to collect all forces, to sweep the battle area on the chance of stragglers, and to return to harbour. This was accordingly done.

Nobody's
Victory.

So ended the Battle of Jutland. The Germans loudly proclaimed a victory. There was no victory for anyone; but they had good reason to be content with their young Navy. It had fought skilfully and well. It had made its escape from the grip of overwhelming forces, and in so doing had inflicted heavier loss in ships and men than it had itself received. The British Battle Fleet was never seriously in action. Only one ship, the *Colossus*, was struck by an enemy shell, and out of more than 20,000 men in the battleships only two were killed and five wounded. To this supreme instrument had been devoted the best of all that Britain could give for many years. It was vastly superior to its opponent in numbers, tonnage, speed, and above all gun power, and was at least its equal in discipline, individual skill and courage. The disappointment of all ranks was deep; and immediately there arose reproaches and recriminations, continued to this day, through which this account has sought to steer a faithful and impartial passage. All hoped that another opportunity would be granted them, and eagerly sought to profit by the lessons of the battle. The chance of an annihilating victory had been perhaps offered at the moment of deployment, had been offered again an hour later when Scheer made his great miscalculation, and for the third time when a little before midnight the Commander-in-Chief decided to reject the evidence of the Admiralty message. Three times is a lot.

* * * * *

Nevertheless one last chance of bringing the German Fleet to action was offered. Within six weeks of Jutland, on the evening of August 18, Admiral Scheer again put to sea. His object was to bombard Sunderland; and his hope, to draw the British Fleet, if it intervened, into his U-boat flotillas. His main flotilla of seventeen U-boats was dis-

The German
Sortie of
Aug. 19.

posed in two lines on the probable tracks of the British Fleet : one off Blyth and one off the Yorkshire coast ; while twelve boats of the Flanders flotilla were stationed off the Dutch coast. Four Zeppelins patrolled between Peterhead and Norway : three off the British coast between Newcastle and Hull, and one in the Flanders Bight. The German Second Battle Squadron, composed of the slow *Deutschlands*, was on this occasion not allowed to accompany the Fleet. Thus protected by the airships, bristling with U-boats, and unencumbered by their older vessels, the Germans steamed boldly on their course.

The preliminary German movements had not passed unnoticed by the Admiralty ; and during the forenoon of the 18th the Grand Fleet battle squadrons were ordered to rendezvous in the 'Long Forties,' the battle-cruisers to join further south, and the Harwich force to rendezvous to the eastward of Yarmouth. Twenty-six British submarines—five in the Heligoland Bight, eight in the Flanders Bight, one off the Dutch coast and twelve off Yarmouth and the Tyne—were in their turn spread to intercept the enemy.

The movements of the two Fleets during the 19th are shown in broad outline on the chart. The day's operations were heralded by submarine attacks on both sides. At 5.5 a.m. the German battleship *Westfalen* was hit by a torpedo from the British submarine E.23, and she turned for home at 7.22. Admiral Scheer held steadily on his course with the remainder of the Fleet. About 6 a.m. the *Nottingham*, one of Beatty's advanced line of cruisers, was struck by two torpedoes from U-52, was hit again at 6.25, and sank at 7.10. At first there was some doubt whether she had been sunk by mine or torpedo. But at 6.48 a report from the *Southampton* was received by the Flagship, the *Iron Duke*, making it certain that the *Nottingham* had been sunk by a torpedo. About the same time a signal was received from the Admiralty, fixing the position of the German Fleet. Sir John Jellicoe however appears to have remained under the impression that the *Nottingham* had been destroyed by a mine. He consequently suspected a trap ; and at 7 a.m. he turned the Grand Fleet about and steamed to the northward for over two hours, until 9.8 a.m.

It is not clear, even on the assumption that the *Nottingham* had been sunk by a mine, why this manœuvre was necessary. A comparatively slight alteration of course would have carried the Grand Fleet many miles clear of the area of the suspected mine fields, and the possibility of getting between the German Fleet and home presented itself. Such a situation had been foreseen in the Note which, with the concurrence of the First Sea Lord, I had sent to Sir John Jellicoe at the beginning of the war (August 8, 1914).

The Achievement of
U-52.

‘ Their Lordships would wish to emphasise that it is not part of the Grand Fleet’s duty to prevent such raids, but to deal with the enemy’s Battle Fleet. . . . They [the enemy] may expect you to come direct to prevent the raid, and therefore may lay one or more lines of mines across your expected course or use their submarines for the same purpose ; whereas if you approached them from an eastward or a north-eastward direction, you would cut the whole Fleet from its base . . . and you would approach by a path along which the chance of meeting mines would be sensibly reduced. In our mind therefore you should ignore the raid or raids and work by a circuitous route so as to get between the enemy’s Fleet or covering force and home.’

U-52 had however struck harder than she knew. It took two hours after the Grand Fleet turned again towards the enemy to recover the lost ground. So that in all four hours were lost and the chance of cutting off the High Sea Fleet seriously reduced. It cannot however be said that this was the cause of preventing battle. An accident of a different character was to intervene. Admiral Tyrwhitt with the Harwich force was meanwhile cruising near the southern rendezvous. During the afternoon Scheer received five air-ship reports—one of the Grand Fleet and four of the Harwich force. He also received three submarine reports about the Grand Fleet. The British forces to the northward all seemed to be steaming away from him as if some concentration were taking place in that direction. At 12.35 p.m. however the German air-ship L13 reported strong British forces about seventy miles to the southward, and that these had been seen coming north at 11.30 a.m. This was of course the Harwich force. Admiral Scheer jumped to the

Some Con-
clusions.

conclusion that it was the Grand Fleet and that his retreat was compromised. He thereupon turned completely about at 3.15, and after waiting for his battle-cruisers to get ahead of him steamed for home. Meanwhile Sir John Jellicoe, having recovered his lost distance, and having received at 1.30 p.m. a signal from the Admiralty fixing the position of the German Flagship at 12.33, was now proceeding at nineteen knots towards the area which Scheer had just vacated. The chart on board the *Iron Duke* seemed to indicate that a fleet action was imminent, and every preparation was made by Sir John Jellicoe to engage the enemy. After advancing for nearly two hours in full readiness for action, with the battle-cruisers on his starboard and the 5th Battle Squadron on his port bow, he still saw nothing of the enemy. At 3.57 all hope of meeting the Germans was abandoned and the Grand Fleet turned again homeward, losing on the way another light cruiser, the *Falmouth*, by a U-boat torpedo. At about 6 o'clock the Harwich force sighted the German Fleet. But the Grand Fleet was too far off to offer them any support, and at 7 p.m. Admiral Tyrwhitt turned for his base, and thus the operations of August 19 came to an end.

* * * * *

I feel it unfitting to end this chapter without drawing some conclusions from the events it has attempted to describe. First: Material. What was the cause of the swift destruction of the three British battle-cruisers? The side armour of the *Invincible* was only from 6 to 7 inches thick. She was in action at under 10,000 yards range, and her magazines may well have been exploded by heavy shells which directly pierced her armour belt. But the *Queen Mary* was fighting at over 18,000 yards range when the fatal salvo struck her. She was in her place in the line undamaged, steaming 25 knots and firing from all her guns, a minute or two before she blew up. The *Indefatigable* succumbed at the same extreme range as easily. There can be only two possible explanations. Either the magazines had been penetrated by a shell, or a shell bursting in the turret had ignited the ammunition there, and the flash and flame had roared down the 60-foot hoist

AUGUST 19TH 1916
NORTH SEA.

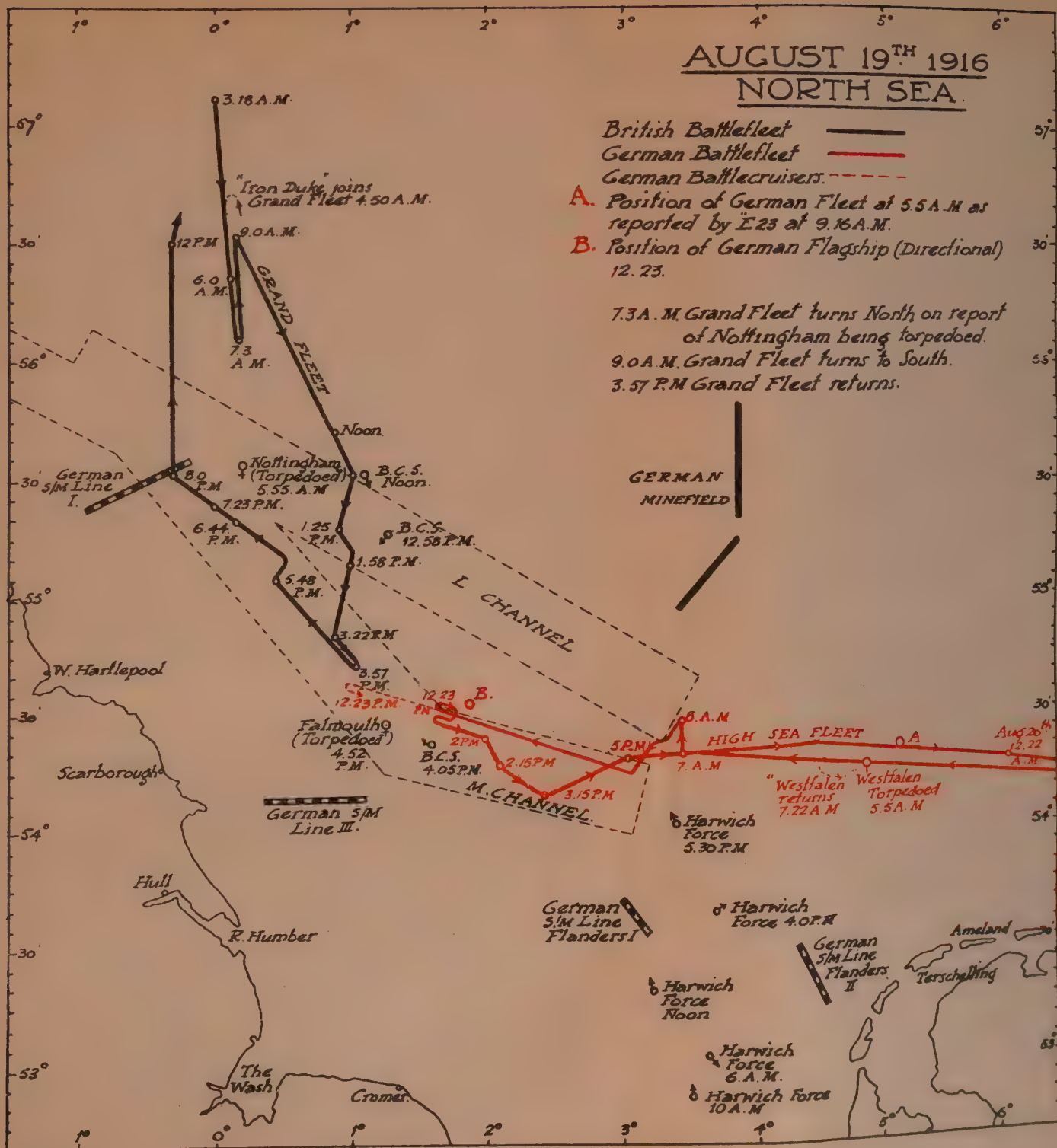
British Battlefleet

German Battlefleet

German Battlecruisers.

- A. Position of German Fleet at 5.5 A.M. as reported by E23 at 9.16 A.M.
- B. Position of German Flagship (Directional)
12. 23.

7.3 A.M. Grand Fleet turns North on report
of Nottingham being torpedoed.
9.0 A.M. Grand Fleet turns to South.
3.57 P.M. Grand Fleet returns.



into the magazines. There is no doubt that the magazines of British battle-cruisers were not sufficiently protected against long-range fire. The ranges at which the sea battles of the Great War were fought were vastly greater than any contemplated before the war. Our Naval Constructors had not therefore taken sufficient account of the plunging character of the fire to which the decks and turret roofs would be subjected. The German battle-cruiser armour was better distributed. Moreover, the British battle-cruisers, as developed by Fisher and to a large extent by Jellicoe, though more heavily gunned were less strongly armoured than their German compeers. Casting a new eye on naval architecture in 1911, I had recoiled from the battle-cruiser type. To spend in those days two million pounds upon a vessel of the greatest power and speed which could not face a strong battleship seemed to me a fruitless proceeding. I therefore opposed the increase of the battle-cruiser class in which we already had superiority, and succeeded in persuading the Board of Admiralty to cancel the battle-cruiser projected for the programme of 1912, and to build instead of one battle-cruiser and four slow battleships the five fast battleships of the *Queen Elizabeth* design. I also excluded the annual battle-cruiser from the programmes of 1913 and 1914. These matters have been fully set forth in Volume I.

The Battle-cruiser Type.

Nevertheless it is more likely that the *Queen Mary* and *Indefatigable* were destroyed by flash down the turret ammunition hoists than by penetration of their decks. The roofs of the gun-houses directly exposed to plunging fire were only 3 inches thick. From the working chambers of these turrets the ammunition tube led directly to the handing-room outside the magazine 60 feet below. The danger of the flash of an explosion passing down this tube had from the earliest days of modern ironclads always been recognized. Competition in gunnery practices between ships in peace time had however led to the omission of various precautions. The magazine doors at the bottom of the tube were not doubled. One of them could not therefore be kept always closed in action. Nor were they even shrouded by thick curtains of felt. The shutter which closed

The Flash Danger.

the hoist in which the charge was lifted had in some cases been removed for the sake of greater rapidity in loading. A free and easy habit of handling cordite in large quantities had grown up. The silk coverings of the British charges did not give the same security against fire as did the German brass cartridge cases, albeit that these had other disadvantages. All down the tube from the breech of the gun to the magazine, at least four double

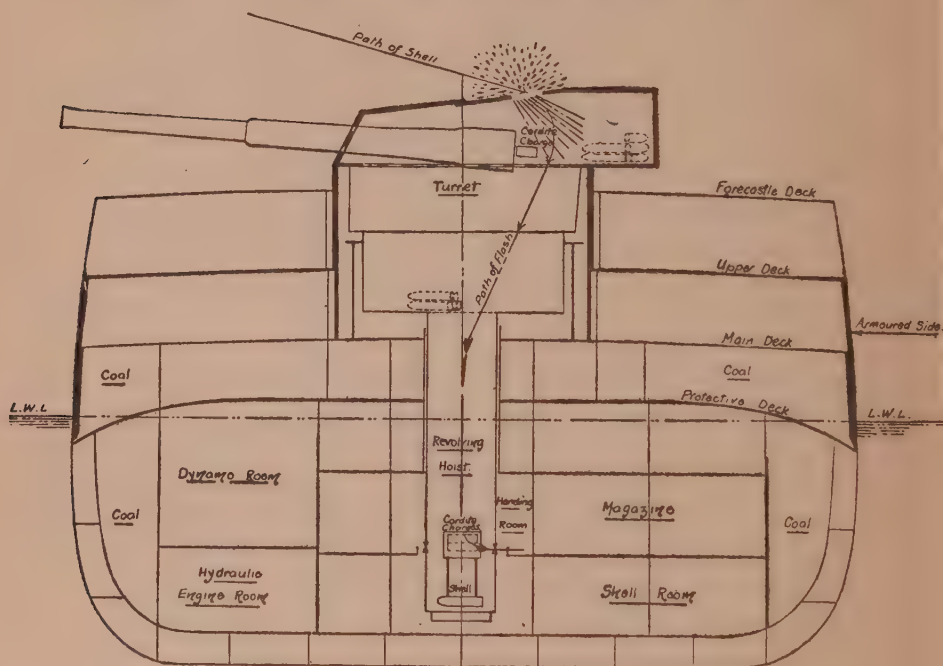


DIAGRAM SHEWING SECTION OF WARSHIP IN WAY OF TURRET
AND EFFECT OF SHELL STRIKING ROOF OF TURRET.

cordite charges made a complete train of explosive. The flash of a heavy shell exploding in the gun house, or of a fire starting in the cordite charges there, might in these circumstances be carried almost simultaneously into the very magazine itself. Here is the most probable cause of the destruction both of the *Queen Mary* and the *Indefatigable*, and we know how nearly the *Lion* shared their fate.

Against this danger the Germans were forewarned and forearmed by an incident in the Dogger Bank action of

January, 1915. A 13.5-inch shell had penetrated the after turret of the *Seydlitz*, setting fire to the charges and to a small 'ready magazine.' A vast flame enveloped the turret and spread through the passages to the next, gutting both turrets completely and killing over two hundred men. This lesson led to drastic changes in the protection of the German ammunition supply and in drill, similar to those introduced into British ships after Jutland.

British and
German
Shell.

It was always argued by the Naval experts that although the later German battle-cruisers—about which we were not ill-informed—carried more armour than their British opposite numbers, this advantage was more than counter-balanced by our having far heavier guns and shells. It was however proved by the test of battle that the British heavy armour-piercing shell was inferior to the German shell *of equal size* in carrying its explosion through the armour. Such a result should for ever banish complacency from the technical branches of our Naval Ordnance Department, and should lead successive Boards of Admiralty repeatedly to canvass and overhaul the scientific data with which they are presented and to compare them in an open-minded mood with foreign practices.

What bearing had these deficiencies upon the chances of a general fought-out Fleet battle? This question is at once fundamental and capable of decisive answer.

On no occasion either at the Dogger Bank or Jutland did even the heaviest German shell succeed in penetrating British armour over $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. All hits made on 9-inch armour were effectually resisted by the plate. The vitals of all British battleships engaged at Jutland were protected by 13-inch, 12-inch, 11-inch, or at the very least 9-inch armour. It follows that if the main British Battle Fleet had been seriously engaged at Jutland—apart from the ill-luck of an occasional flash carried down an ammunition hoist—it would not have suffered severely from German shell fire. We know that the main armaments and engines of the four *Queen Elizabeths* were undamaged after coming under a heavy fire from all the strongest vessels of the German Battle Fleet as well as from the German battle-cruisers. Out of five hits of 12-inch shell on their heavy

British and
German
Shell.

armour, none penetrated. The roof of one of the *Malaya's* turrets ($4\frac{1}{2}$ inches) was hit by a heavy projectile without any damage being done. It may therefore be concluded that the armoured protection of the British Battle Fleet was ample to resist the 12-inch shell of the heaviest German guns afloat at Jutland.

On the other hand, at the Dogger Bank a British 13.5-inch shell pierced and burst inside the 9-inch armour of one of the *Seydlitz's* turrets; and at Jutland a British 15-inch shell penetrated the 10-inch armour on the front of the *Seydlitz's* "D" turret, and a 13.5-inch shell penetrated her 9-inch armour. In these two latter cases however the force of the explosion was expended outside. The *Lützow* at Jutland showed similar results. At least one 13.5-inch shell penetrated and burst inside 8-inch or 12-inch armour, while another drove in a 10-inch turret plate, causing a fire in the turret. At least one 15-inch shell penetrated and burst inside a 10-inch or 12-inch turret plate on the *Derfflinger*, causing a terrific fire which completely gutted the turret. Such were the results obtained in the two Fleets engaging at long range. It would be easy to add to these examples. Had the battle been fought to a conclusion at medium or shorter range, the penetration of the guns on both sides would have increased; but the superior relation of the heavier British shell would at every stage have been maintained.

It is upon this basis of ascertained fact that the numerical strength of the rival Fleets must be considered. The British superiority in the line of battle of 37 Dreadnought ships to 21 German similar units and the double weight of the British broadside were factors which may justly be described as overwhelming. The margin of safety both in numbers and in gun power was so large as to reduce the important defects mentioned to a minor scale, and to make full allowance against accidents.

In the sphere of tactics it is evident that the danger of under-water damage by mine or torpedo, the danger of 'losing half the fleet before a shot is fired,' dominated the mind of the British Commander-in-Chief. This danger, though less great than was supposed at the time, was

nevertheless real and terrible. Coupled with a true measure of the disproportionate consequences of battle to the rival navies, it enforced a policy of extreme caution upon Sir John Jellicoe. This policy was deliberately adopted by him after prolonged thought, and inflexibly adhered to, not only before and during the encounter at Jutland but afterwards. The policy cannot be condemned on account of the unsatisfying episodes to which it led, without due and constant recognition of the fatal consequences which might have followed from the opposite course or from recklessness. Admitting this however to the full, it does not cover several of the crucial Jutland situations, nor that which arose in the German sortie of August 19. Tactical movements lay open on these occasions to the Grand Fleet for gripping the enemy without in any way increasing the risk of being led into an under-water trap. A more flexible system of fleet training and manœuvring would have enabled these movements to be made. The attempt to centralize in a single hand the whole conduct in action of so vast a fleet failed. The Commander-in-Chief, with the best will in the world, could not see or even know what was going on. No attempt was made to use the fast division of battleships (*Queen Elizabeths*) to engage the enemy on the opposite side and hold him up to the battle. The British light cruiser squadrons and flotillas were not used as they ought to have been to parry and rupture hostile torpedo attacks, but these were dealt with merely by the passive turn away of the whole Fleet. The sound and prudent reasoning of the Commander-in-Chief against being led into traps did not apply to situations where the enemy was obviously himself surprised, separated from his harbours, and dealing with utterly unforeseen and unforeseeable emergencies. Praiseworthy caution had induced a defensive habit of mind and scheme of tactics which hampered the Grand Fleet even when the special conditions enjoining the caution did not exist.

The ponderous, poignant responsibilities borne successfully, if not triumphantly, by Sir John Jellicoe during two years of faithful command, constitute unanswerable claims to the lasting respect of the nation. But the Royal Navy

Tactics.

The Future. must find in other personalities and other episodes the golden links which carried forward through the Great War the audacious and conquering traditions of the past ; and it is to Beatty and the battle-cruisers, to Keyes at Zeebrugge, to Tyrwhitt and his Harwich striking force, to the destroyer and submarine flotillas out in all weathers and against all foes, to the wild adventures of the Q-ships, to the steadfast resolution of the British Merchant Service, that the eyes of rising generations will turn.

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

*'Pray God that you may never know
The Hell where youth and laughter go.'*

SIEGFRIED SASSOON.

Inevitability—Strength of the German Line—Absence of Surprise—Objective of July 1—Opening of the Battle—The 8th Division—Through German Eyes—Tragedy—The greatest British Loss in History—The Battle sinks to a Minor Scale—Its Obstinate Prolongation—The Anatomy of the Battlefield—Conditions become more Equal—The Strain on the Enemy—The Exposure of the Tanks—Their Effect—My Memorandum of August 1, 1916—The Question of Relative Losses—Accuracy of its Figures—Actual British and German Losses—Criticism of Results—Soothing Information—Inexorable Forces—Glory of the Troops.

A SENSE of the inevitable broods over the battlefields of the Somme. The British armies were so ardent, their leaders so confident, the need and appeals of our Allies so clamant, and decisive results seemingly so near, that no human power could have prevented the attempt. All the spring the French had been battling and dying at Verdun, immolating their manhood upon that anvil-altar; and every chivalrous instinct in the new British armies called them to the succour of France, and inspired them with sacrifice and daring. Brusiloff's surprising successes redoubled, if that were possible, the confidence of the British Generals. They were quite sure they were going to break their enemy and rupture his invading lines in France. They trusted to the devotion of their troops, which they knew was boundless; they trusted to masses of artillery and shells never before accumulated in war; and they launched their attack in the highest sense of duty and the strongest conviction of success.

The military conceptions underlying the scheme of attack were characterized by simplicity. The policy of the

Inevit-
ability.

Strength of
the German
Line.

French and British Commanders had selected as the point for their offensive what was undoubtedly the strongest and most perfectly defended position in the world.

‘During nearly two years’ preparation’¹ (writes Sir Douglas Haig) ‘he (the enemy) had spared no pains to render these defences impregnable. The first and second systems each consisted of several lines of deep trenches, well provided with bomb-proof shelters and with numerous communication trenches connecting them. The front of the trenches in each system was protected by wire entanglements, many of them in two belts forty yards broad, built of iron stakes interlaced with barbed wire, often almost as thick as a man’s finger.

‘The numerous woods and villages in and between these systems of defence had been turned into veritable fortresses. The deep cellars usually to be found in the villages, and the numerous pits and quarries common to a chalk country, were used to provide cover for machine guns and trench mortars. The existing cellars were supplemented by elaborate dug-outs, sometimes in two storeys, and these were connected up by passages as much as thirty feet below the surface of the ground. The salients in the enemy’s line, from which he could bring enfilade fire across his front, were made into self-contained forts, and often protected by mine-fields; while strong redoubts and concrete machine-gun emplacements had been constructed in positions from which he could sweep his own trenches should these be taken. The ground lent itself to good artillery observation on the enemy’s part, and he had skilfully arranged for cross-fire by his guns.

‘These various systems of defence, with the fortified localities and other supporting points between them, were cunningly sited to afford each other mutual assistance and to admit of the utmost possible development of enfilade and flanking fire by machine guns and artillery. They formed, in short, not merely a series of successive lines, but one composite system of enormous depth and strength.

‘Behind his second system of trenches, in addition to woods, villages and other strong points prepared for defence, the enemy had several other lines already completed; and we had learnt from aeroplane reconnaissance that he was hard at work improving and strengthening these and digging fresh ones between them, and still farther back.’

¹ *Sir Douglas Haig’s Despatches* : J. H. Boraston, pp. 22-3.

All these conditions clearly indicated to the Staffs a suitable field for our offensive, and it was certain that if the enemy were defeated here, he would be more disheartened than by being overcome upon some easier battleground.

Absence of
Surprise.

Sir Douglas also describes his own preparations, which were thorough and straightforward¹:

‘Vast stocks of ammunition and stores of all kinds had to be accumulated beforehand within a convenient distance of our front. To deal with these many miles of new railways—both standard and narrow gauge—and trench tramways were laid. All available roads were improved, many others were made, and long causeways were built over marshy valleys. . . . Scores of miles of deep communication trenches had to be dug, as well as trenches for telephone wires, assembly and assault trenches, and numerous gun-emplacements and observation posts.’

Thus there was no chance of surprise. Nothing could be introduced to obscure the plain trial of strength between the armies, or diminish the opportunities for valour on the part of the assaulting troops. For months the Germans had observed the vast uncamouflaged preparations proceeding opposite the sector of attack. For a week a preliminary bombardment of varying but unexampled intensity had lashed their trenches with its scourge of steel and fire. Crouched in their deep chalk caves the stubborn German infantry, short often through the cannonade of food and water, awaited the signal to man their broken parapets. The lanes which the British shrapnel had laboriously cut through their barbed-wire entanglements were all carefully studied, and machine guns were accurately sited to sweep them or traverse the approaches with flanking fire. Even one machine gun in skilled resolute hands might lay five hundred men dead and dying on the ground; and along the assaulted front certainly a thousand such weapons scientifically related in several lines of defence awaited their prey. Afar the German gunners, unmolested by counter-battery, stood ready to release their defending barrages on the British front lines, on their communication trenches and places of assembly.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Objectives
of July 1.

Colonel Boraston's account is studiously vague as to the objectives sought for by his Chief on July 1. The plan of the British and French was admittedly to pierce the whole German trench system on a front of many kilometres, and then by wheeling outwards—the British to the north-east and north and the French to the south-east—to roll up from the flanks the exposed portions of the German line; and British and French cavalry divisions were held ready to be pushed forward through the gap so made. The French objective was to gain the rising ground east of the Somme south of Péronne, while 'the corresponding British objective' was 'the semicircle of high ground running from the neighbourhood of Le Transloy through Bapaume to Achiet-le-Grand.'¹ But these objectives, says Colonel Boraston, were not expected to be reached in the first assault. 'These Somme positions were objectives for the armies concerned rather than for the troops from time to time engaged in the attack. They marked the stage at which it was thought that the penetration would be deep enough . . . to enable the Allied armies to turn their attention to the second stage of the battle, that is to say, the rolling up of the German forces on the flank of the point of rupture.'² It was certainly contemplated from the beginning that the battle would be long and hard fought; but it will be seen that the time factor is thus left altogether indefinite. One remains under the impression that it was comparatively immaterial whether this penetrating advance and outward movement were to be effected in a few days, a week, a fortnight, or even longer. But this argument cannot be sustained. The whole effectiveness of the plan depended on the speed of its execution. If for instance an interval of two or three days intervened between the penetration and the outward wheel, the enemy's line would be switched back on both sides of the gap and a whole new web of fortifications would obstruct a further advance. All prospect of a great rupture followed by rolling up the flanks was dependent upon a rate of progress so rapid as to preclude the construction and organization by the enemy of fresh defensive lines. If the Joffre-Haig plan was to achieve

¹ *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, p. 93.

² *Ibid.*

any success apart from mere attrition, progress must be continuous and rapid, and the objectives specified must be attained at the latest in two or three days. If this were not secured, the great attack would have failed. Other attacks might subsequently be planned and might be locally successful, but the scheme of a grand rupture was definitely at an end.

Opening of
the Battle.

It is easy to prove that rapid progress was in fact contemplated and resolutely bid for. The use by Haig of his artillery clearly indicates the immediate ambitions which were in view. Instead of concentrating the fire on the first lines which were to be assaulted, the British artillery was dispersed in its action over the second and remoter lines and on many strong points far in the rear, the hope clearly being that all these would be reached in the course of the first day or two-days' fighting. The position of the British and French cavalry in close proximity to the battle front also reveals indisputably the hopes and expectations of the commanders.

At seven o'clock in the morning of July 1 the British and French armies rose from their trenches steel-helmeted, gas-masked, equipped with all the latest apparatus of war, bombs, mortars, machine-guns light and heavy, and, supported by all their artillery, marched against the enemy on a front of 45 kilometres. Fourteen British divisions and five French divisions were almost immediately engaged.¹ South of the Somme on the French front the Germans were taken completely by surprise. They had not believed the French capable after their punishment at Verdun of any serious offensive effort. They expected at the most only demonstrations. They were not ready for the French, and the French attack, though unfortunately on a needlessly small scale, captured and overwhelmed the German troops throughout the whole of their first system of trenches.

Very different were the fortunes of the British. Everywhere they found the enemy fully prepared. The seven-days' bombardment had by no means accomplished what had been expected. Safely hidden in the deep dugouts, the defenders and their machine guns were practically

¹ See map, p. 181.

The 8th
Division.

intact. From these they emerged with deadly effect at the moment of assault or even after the waves of attack had actually passed over and beyond them. Though the German front line was crossed at every point, the great advance into his position failed except on the right. The three British divisions on that flank captured Montauban and Mametz and an area $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles wide by $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles deep, thus isolating Fricourt on the south. The 21st Division north of this village also made progress and gained nearly a mile. But though the defenders of Fricourt were thus almost cut off, the attempt to storm the village failed. Northwards again the two divisions of the Third Army, though they advanced a thousand yards, failed in spite of repeated efforts to capture La Boisselle or Ovillers on the long spurs of the Pozières plateau. By nightfall the gain in this part of the field comprised only two pockets or bulges in the enemy's position. The attack of the X Corps with three divisions broke down before the immense defences of the Thiepval spur and plateau. Although two of its great supporting points, the Leipzig and Schwaben redoubts, were captured, all attacks on Thiepval failed, and the failure to take Thiepval entailed the evacuation of the Schwaben. Opposite Beaumont-Hamel, on the extreme left, the VIII Corps, after reaching the German front line, was driven back to its own trenches. The subsidiary attack made by the Third Army against Gommecourt completely failed, practically no damage to the German defences having been done in the long bombardment.

* * * * *

Let us descend from this general viewpoint into closer contact with a single Division. The 8th Division, with all its three brigades in line, was to assault the Ovillers spur: the centre brigade up the ridge; the others through the valleys on each side. Both the valleys were enfiladed from the German positions at La Boisselle and in front of Thiepval. Against these three brigades stood the German 180th Infantry Regiment with two battalions holding the front defences, and the third battalion in reserve north of Pozières. After allowing for battalion reserves, there were ten Companies comprising about 1,800 men to oppose the

three brigades, together about 8,500 bayonets, of the 8th Division.

Through
German
Eyes.

At 7.30 the British artillery barrage lifted. The trench mortars ceased fire, and the leading battalions of all three brigades rose and moved forward, each battalion extended on a frontage of 400 yards. A violent machine-gun and rifle fire opened immediately along the whole front of the German position, particularly from the machine-gun nests of La Boisselle and Ovillers; and almost simultaneously the German batteries behind Ovillers placed a barrage in No Man's Land and along the British front line and support trenches. Here let the German eyewitness speak.

'The intense bombardment was realized by all to be a prelude to the infantry assault at last. The men in the dug-outs therefore waited ready, a belt full of hand grenades around them, gripping their rifles and listening for the bombardment to lift from the front defence zone on to the rear defences. It was of vital importance to lose not a second in taking up position in the open to meet the British infantry who would be advancing immediately behind the artillery barrage. Looking towards the British trenches through the long trench periscopes held up out of the dug-out entrances, there could be seen a mass of steel helmets above their parapet showing that their storm-troops were ready for the assault. At 7.30 a.m. the hurricane of shells ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Our men at once clambered up the steep shafts leading from the dugouts to daylight and ran singly or in groups to the nearest shell craters. The machine guns were pulled out of the dugouts and hurriedly placed into position, their crews dragging the heavy ammunition boxes up the steps and out to the guns. A rough firing line was thus rapidly established. As soon as in position, a series of extended lines of British infantry were seen moving forward from the British trenches. The first line appeared to continue without end to right and left. It was quickly followed by a second line, then a third and fourth. They came on at a steady easy pace as if expecting to find nothing alive in our front trenches. . . . The front line, preceded by a thin line of skirmishers and bombers, was now half-way across No Man's Land. "Get ready!" was passed along our front from crater to crater, and heads appeared over the crater edges as final positions were taken up for the best view and machine guns mounted firmly in place. A few minutes later, when the leading British line

Tragedy.

was within 100 yards, the rattle of machine gun and rifle fire broke out from along the whole line of craters. Some fired kneeling so as to get a better target over the broken ground, while others in the excitement of the moment, stood up regardless of their own safety to fire into the crowd of men in front of them. Red rockets sped up into the blue sky as a signal to the artillery, and immediately afterwards a mass of shells from the German batteries in rear tore through the air and burst among the advancing lines. Whole sections seemed to fall, and the rear formations, moving in closer order, quickly scattered. The advance rapidly crumpled under this hail of shells and bullets. All along the line men could be seen throwing their arms into the air and collapsing never to move again. Badly wounded rolled about in their agony, and others less severely injured crawled to the nearest shell-hole for shelter. The British soldier, however, has no lack of courage, and once his hand is set to the plough he is not easily turned from his purpose. The extended lines, though badly shaken and with many gaps, now came on all the faster. Instead of a leisurely walk they covered the ground in short rushes at the double. Within a few minutes the leading troops had reached within a stone's throw of our front trench, and while some of us continued to fire at point-blank range, others threw hand grenades among them. The British bombers answered back, while the infantry rushed forward with fixed bayonets. The noise of battle became indescribable. The shouting of orders and the shrill British cheers as they charged forward could be heard above the violent and intense fusillade of machine guns and rifles and the bursting bombs, and above the deep thunderings of the artillery and the shell explosions. With all this were mingled the moans and groans of the wounded, the cries for help and the last screams of death. Again and again the extended lines of British infantry broke against the German defence like waves against a cliff, only to be beaten back.

It was an amazing spectacle of unexampled gallantry, courage and bull-dog determination on both sides.¹

At several points the British who had survived the awful fire storm broke into the German trenches. They were nowhere strong enough to maintain their position; and by nine o'clock the whole of the troops who were still alive and unwounded were either back in their own front-line trenches, or sheltering in the shell-holes of No Man's Land, or cut off and desperately defending themselves in the captured

¹ *Die Schwaben an der Ancre*, Gerster.

German trenches. A renewed attack was immediately ordered by Divisional Headquarters. But the Brigadiers reported they had no longer the force to attempt it. A fresh brigade was sent from the III Corps Headquarters. But before it could share the fate of the others, all signs of fighting inside the German trenches by the British who had entered them had been extinguished ; and the orders to renew the assault were cancelled. Here are some of the losses :

The greatest
British Loss
in History.

2/Middlesex	22 officers ;	592 other ranks
2/Devons	16 "	418 " "
2/West Yorks	16 "	490 " "
2/Berkshire	20 "	414 " "
2/Lincoln	20 "	434 " "
1/Irish Rifles	17 "	411 " "
8/K.O.Y.L.I.	25 (all),	522 " "
8/York and Lancaster	23 "	613 " "
9/York and Lancaster	23 "	517 " "
11/Sherwood Foresters	20 "	488 " "

In all, the Division lost in little more than two hours 218 out of 300 officers and 5,274 other ranks out of 8,500 who had gone into action. By the evening of July 1, the German 180th Infantry Regiment was again in possession of the whole of its trenches. Its losses during the day's fighting had been 8 officers and 273 soldiers killed, wounded and missing. Only two of its three battalions had been engaged. It had not been necessary to call the reserve battalion to their aid.

* * * * *

Night closed over the still-thundering battlefield. Nearly 60,000 British soldiers had fallen, killed or wounded, or were prisoners in the hands of the enemy. This was the greatest loss and slaughter sustained in a single day in the whole history of the British Army. Of the infantry who advanced to the attack, nearly half had been overtaken by death, wounds or capture. Against this, apart from territory, we had gained 4,000 prisoners and a score of cannon. It needs some hardihood for Colonel Boraston to write :¹

'The events of July 1 . . . bore out the conclusions of the British higher command and amply justified the tactical methods employed.'

¹ *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, p. 103.

The Battle
sinks to a
Minor Scale.

The extent of the catastrophe was concealed by the Censorship, and its significance masked by a continuance of the fighting on a far smaller scale, four divisions alone being employed. The shattered divisions on the left were placed under General Gough, whose command, originally designated the 'Reserve Corps' and intended to receive resting divisions, was renamed the 'Reserve Army' and given orders to maintain 'a slow and methodical pressure' on the enemy's front. Henceforward the battle degenerated into minor operations which proceeded continuously on a comparatively small front. The losses were however in this phase more evenly balanced, as the Germans delivered many vigorous counter-attacks.

'To sum up the results of the fighting of these five days' (says Haig with severe accuracy)¹ 'on a front of over six miles . . . our troops had swept over the whole of the enemy's first and strongest system of defence. . . . They had driven him back over a distance of more than a mile, and had carried four elaborately fortified villages.'

These gains had however been purchased by the loss of nearly a hundred thousand of our best troops. The battle continued. The objectives were now pulverized villages and blasted woods, and the ground conquered was at each stage so limited both in width and depth as to exclude any strategic results. On July 14 a dawn attack towards Bazentin-le-Grand led to a local success, and the world was eagerly informed that a squadron of the 7th Dragoon Guards had actually ridden on their horses as far as High Wood, whence they were withdrawn the next day.

'The enemy's second main system of defence' (writes Sir Douglas)² 'had been captured on a front of over three miles. We had forced him back more than a mile. . . . Four more of his fortified villages and three woods had been wrested from him by determined fighting, and our advanced troops had penetrated as far as his third line of defence.'

Unfortunately the enemy 'had dug and wired many new trenches, both in front and behind his original front lines. He had also brought up fresh troops, and there was

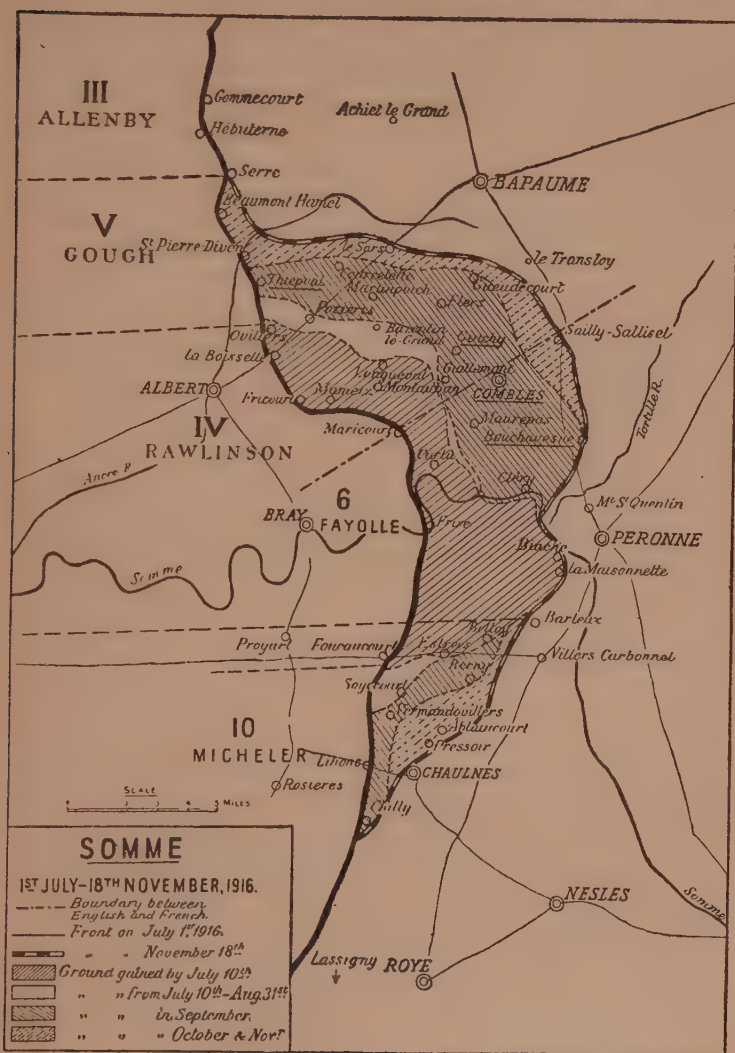
¹ *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches*, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1.

no possibility of taking him by surprise. The task before us was therefore a very difficult one. . . . At this juncture its difficulties were increased by unfavourable weather.'¹

Its Obstinate Pro-
longation.

As the divisions which had been specially prepared for



the battle were successively shot to pieces and used up, their remnants were sent to hold the trenches in the quiet portions of the front, thus setting free other divisions, not previously engaged, for their turn in the furnace. It was

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The Anatomy of the Battlefield.

not until July 20 that the battle again expanded to the proportions of a great operation. On this day and the two days following a general attack was organized by seventeen British and French divisions on the front Pozières-Foucaucourt. The losses were again very heavy, particularly to the British. Only a few hundred yards were gained upon the average along the front.

The conflict sank once more to the bloody but local struggles of two or three divisions repeatedly renewed as fast as they were consumed, and consumed as fast as they were renewed. By the end of July an advance of about two and a half miles had been made on a front which at this depth did not exceed two miles. For these gains 171,000¹ British soldiers had fallen—killed or wounded. 11,400 German prisoners had been captured, but more than double that number of British prisoners and wounded had fallen into the hands of the enemy, of whom many had under the terrible conditions of the battle perished between the fighting lines beyond the aid of friend or foe.

The anatomy of the battles of Verdun and the Somme was the same. A battlefield had been selected. Around this battlefield walls were built—double, triple, quadruple—of enormous cannon. Behind these railways were constructed to feed them, and mountains of shells were built up. All this was the work of months. Thus the battlefield was completely encircled by thousands of guns of all sizes, and a wide oval space prepared in their midst. Through this awful arena all the divisions of each army, battered ceaselessly by the enveloping artillery, were made to pass in succession, as if they were the teeth of interlocking cog-wheels grinding each other.

For month after month the ceaseless cannonade continued at its utmost intensity, and month after month the gallant divisions of heroic human beings were torn to pieces in this terrible rotation. Then came the winter, pouring down rain from the sky to clog the feet of men, and drawing veils of mist before the hawk-eyes of their artillery. The arena, as used to happen in the Coliseum in those miniature

¹ i.e., 196,000 minus 25,000 for the quiet sectors. *Military Effort*, Monthly Returns, p. 253 *et seq.*

Roman days, was flooded with water. A vast sea of ensanguined mud, churned by thousands of vehicles, by hundreds of thousands of men and millions of shells, replaced the blasted dust. Still the struggle continued. Still the remorseless wheels revolved. Still the auditorium of artillery roared. At last the legs of men could no longer move; they wallowed and floundered helplessly in the slime. Their food, their ammunition lagged behind them along the smashed and choked roadways.

Conditions
become
more Equal.

As the battle progressed the conditions of offence and defence became more equal. Trenches were obliterated and barbed wire pulverized. The combats tended increasingly to become field actions in a wilderness of shell holes. The enemy's losses grew as the weeks wore on. The battle flared up again into a great operation on September 25 and the following days; and November 13 saw large scale attacks along the Ancre tributary and the brilliant storm of Beaumont-Hamel.

Although the Germans used and risked at almost every stage much smaller numbers of men than the attacking British, the experiences of defence for these smaller numbers were probably even more terrible than for the attack, and the moral effect upon the German Army of seeing position after position, trench after trench, captured and its defenders slaughtered or made prisoners, was undoubtedly deeply depressing. While the British, in spite of their far greater losses, felt themselves to be constantly advancing, and were cheered by captures of trophies and prisoners, the steadfast German soldiery could not escape the impression that they were being devoured piecemeal by the stronger foe. The effect was lasting. German shock troops and assault divisions were in later campaigns to show the highest qualities, and achieve wonderful feats of arms. But never again did the mass of German rank and file fight as they fought on the Somme.

The German 27th Division which defended Guillemont was one of the best divisions here engaged.

Its history says:

'Incontestably a culminating point was reached (at the Somme) that was never again approached. What we exper-

The Strain
on the
Enemy.

ience surpassed all previous conception. The enemy's fire never ceased for an hour. It fell day and night on the front line and tore fearful gaps in the ranks of the defenders ; it fell on the approaches to the front line and made all movement towards the front hell ; it fell on the rearward trenches and the battery positions and smashed up men and material in a manner never seen before or since ; it repeatedly reached even the resting battalions far behind the front and there occasioned exceptionally painful losses, and our artillery was powerless against it.'

And again :

' In the Somme fighting of 1916 there was a spirit of heroism which was never again found in the division, however conspicuous it (the division) remained until the end of the war' . . . ' the men in 1918 had not the temper, the hard bitterness and spirit of sacrifice of their predecessors.' ¹

As the attackers became more experienced, the system of deep dugouts turned against the Germans. ' The Entente troops,' wrote Ludendorff,² ' worked their way further and further into the German lines. We had heavy losses in men and material. At that time the front lines were still strongly held. The men took refuge in dugouts and cellars from the enemy's artillery fire. The enemy came up behind their barrage, got into the trenches and villages before our men could crawl out from their shelter. A continuous yield of prisoners to the enemy was the result. The strain on physical and moral strength was tremendous and divisions could only be kept in the line for a few days at a time. . . . The number of available divisions was shrinking . . . units were hopelessly mixed up, the supply of ammunition was getting steadily shorter. . . . The situation on the Western front gave cause for greater anxiety than I had anticipated. But at that time I did not realize its full significance. It was just as well, otherwise I could never have had the courage to take the important decision to transfer still more divisions from the heavily engaged Western front to the Eastern in order to recover the initiative there and deal Roumania a decisive blow.'

The increasing sense of dominating the enemy and the

¹ *Die 27 Infanterie Division im Weltkrieg.*

² *My War Memories*, p. 244.

resolute desire for a decision at all costs led in September to a most improvident disclosure of the caterpillar vehicles. The first of these had early in January been manœuvred in Hatfield Park in the presence of the King, Lord Kitchener and several high authorities. Lord Kitchener was sceptical; but Mr. Lloyd George was keen, and the British Headquarters mildly interested. Fifty of these engines, developed with great secrecy under the purposely misleading name of 'Tanks,' had been completed. They arrived in France during the early stages of the Battle of the Somme for experimental purposes and the training of their crews. When it was seen how easily they crossed trenches and flattened out entanglements made for trial behind the British line, the force of the conception appealed to the directing minds of the Army. The Headquarters Staff, hitherto so lukewarm, now wished to use them at once in the battle. Mr. Lloyd George thought this employment of the new weapon in such small numbers premature. He informed me of the discussion which was proceeding. I was so shocked at the proposal to expose this tremendous secret to the enemy upon such a petty scale and as a mere make-weight to what I was sure could only be an indecisive operation, that I sought an interview with Mr. Asquith, of whom I was then a very definite opponent. The Prime Minister received me in the most friendly manner, and listened so patiently to my appeal that I thought I had succeeded in convincing him. But if this were so, he did not make his will effective; and on September 15 the first Tanks, or 'large armoured cars' as they were called in the Communiqué, went into action on the front of the Fourth Army attacking between the Combles ravine and Martinpuich.

The Ex-
posure of
the Tanks.

In a memorandum drawn up by General Swinton several months before, when he was organizing the Tank Corps, it had been urged that the tanks should lead the attack, combined in as large numbers as possible, with large forces of infantry launched at once behind them. This advice was not accepted. The tanks—what there were—were dispersed in twos and threes against specified strong points or singly for special purposes. They were used as the

Their Effect. merest makeweight. Of 59 tanks in France 49 reached the battlefield, and of these 35 reached their starting points, of which 31 crossed the German trenches. Although suffering from all the diseases of infancy, and with their crews largely untrained, it was immediately proved that a new factor had been introduced into the war. One single tank on this first occasion, finding the attacking infantry held up in front of Flers by wire and machine guns, climbed over the German trench, and travelling along behind it, immediately and without loss forced its occupants, 300 strong, to surrender. Only 9 tanks surmounted all the difficulties and pushed on ahead of the infantry. Wherever a tank reached its objective, the sight of it was enough, and the astounded Germans forthwith fled or yielded. Ten days later, on September 25, another tank, a female, followed by two companies of infantry, cleared 1,500 yards of the Gird Trench, and took 8 German officers and 362 men prisoners, apart from numerous killed and wounded, with a total loss to the British of only 5 men. Let these episodes be contrasted with the massacre of the 8th Division already described.

Meanwhile, to achieve this miniature success, and to carry the education of the professional mind one stage further forward, a secret of war which well used would have procured a world-shaking victory in 1917 had been recklessly revealed to the enemy. Providentially however the scales of convention darkened also the vision of the German General Staff and clouded even the keen eye of Ludendorff. In the same way the Germans had exposed their secret plans of poison gas by its use on a small scale at Ypres in 1915, when they had no reserves ready to exploit the initial success. But their enemy did not in that instance neglect the knowledge they were given.

* * * * *

I turn aside from the narrative to examine a once keen controversy in which I engaged myself.

During the whole month of July the public and the Cabinet were continually assured that the losses of the Germans in the Somme Battle far exceeded our own. It is certainly necessary not to discourage by the publication

of shocking figures an army or a nation during the progress of a great battle; but a Government is entitled to know the facts from its servants. I held no official position at this time; but applying my knowledge and judgment to all the information I could acquire, I formed my own opinion upon the reports with which I was told the Cabinet were being furnished. I said of course no word in public, but viewing with the utmost pain the terrible and disproportionate slaughter of our troops and the delusions that were rife, I felt it my duty to place on record my appreciation of the facts. I showed this appreciation when written to Sir Frederick Smith,¹ a member of the Cabinet and Attorney-General, with whom I had been for many years on terms of the closest friendship. He thought it right to have it printed and circulated officially to his colleagues. I reprint it here with his covering note.

My Memorandum of
Aug. 1.

In the course of conversation with myself, Winston Churchill asserted his views with regard to the offensive now taking place in the West. I am by no means wholly in agreement with his standpoint, thinking, as I do, that he underrates the importance of our offensive as a contribution to the general strategical situation. I suggested, however, that he should embody his views in a memorandum.

He has done so. After careful consideration, I formed the view that the result would interest my colleagues and enable them to apply their minds to the situation which develops from day to day with both the official and a critical view before them.

I therefore circulate the memorandum

F S

MEMORANDUM.

1. The British attack on the 1st and 2nd July was upon a front of, say, 20,000 to 25,000 yards. On nearly three-fifths of this distance it was repulsed. On rather more than two-fifths it advanced our lines about 2 miles. *Fourteen* British divisions were engaged, exposing (at about 10,000 bayonets each) 140,000 infantry to the full severity of battle.

The facts as
now known :
27,000 yards

Fifteen

On the front attacked the Germans had *eight* divisions, of which *five* were in the line and *three* in reserve. Of the 50,000 bayonets comprised in the five divisions in the line, 20,000 were probably in the first system of

**seven
four three**

¹ Now Lord Birkenhead.

The Ques-
tion of
Relative
Losses.

trenches, 20,000 more in support, and 10,000 in divisional reserve. The 20,000 in the first system of trenches would be the chief sufferers from the bombardment, because they cannot move away from the positions bombarded, and we may assume 50 per cent. loss to them along the whole front *plus* prisoners taken on the section successfully assaulted—10,000+4,000. The supporting troops can be moved about to avoid the shelled localities, and 25 per cent. loss among them to cover bombardment casualties and losses incurred in reinforcement or counter-attack is a liberal estimate—5,000. Ten per cent. is sufficient for the divisional reserves—1,000. Total German loss in the first phase—20,000, of which 4,000 prisoners and 8,000 killed, died of wounds, or disabled for the war (i.e., half the remainder) represent permanent loss—12,000.

What were the British losses? They were certainly down to midnight on the 2nd July not less than 60,000, and of these more than 20,000 were missing, *i.e.*, killed, wounded, or prisoners in the enemy's hands. The Cabinet should require precise figures. On the above basis, however, the permanent loss might be calculated roughly as follows:

Missing	...	...	...	...	20,000
Dead or died of wounds in our own hands					
at 25 per cent. of the remainder	...				10,000
Disabled for the war about ditto	...				10,000
					<hr/>
Total British permanent loss	...				40,000
Total German	„	„	„	...	12,000

It is believed that both these totals are more favourable to us than the actual facts.

171,000

2. Since the first attack the fighting has narrowed to a front of about 7,000 yards, and has become less one-sided owing to German counter-attacks. Our total loss to the end of July is probably 150,000. This is equivalent to half the effective bayonets of thirty divisions. How many divisions have been engaged? How many have been deprived through losses of an offensive value within the next three months? How many fresh divisions are there left? These are serious considerations.

120½

What of the enemy? Out of roughly 120 divisions west of the Rhine about thirty-five were, before the battle, opposite the British and the rest opposite the French and Belgians. The two main concentrations were on the British front and against Verdun. How many additional divisions have been concentrated against the British during the progress of this battle, and where have they come from?

We know that the whole front against us is firmly held. It has been tested at many points, and the enemy has himself shown enterprise and activity at many others. In particular the Australian attack south of Armentières met with most formidable resistance, and our troops were expelled from the German trenches with a loss said to be nearly 3,000. The line opposite the French has also been tested at many points in its 400-mile length, and the front is found everywhere to be effectively maintained by the enemy. The Germans usually hold their lines with the minimum numbers consistent with safety, and it is not likely they can have removed any appreciable force from any part of the ordinary front. There remain only out of the troops west of the Rhine their general reserves, and the concentration in front of Verdun, who could be drawn on. How many divisions have been moved opposite the British from these two sources? Statements that the Germans have brought up thirty divisions opposite to the British should be distrusted. Where can they have come from? The fact that units of thirty

The Question of Relative Losses.

divisions have been identified by contact, if true, is no proof. *It may well be that individual regiments or battalions which were resting have been scraped from different parts of the line to meet the local emergency; but it is not seen how more than the equivalent six or seven additional divisions can have been brought to the sector under the British attack. If this be so, the total German force successively or simultaneously engaged in the battle with us cannot exceed fourteen or fifteen divisions. It is probably less.* The diaries of German

'The Germans scraped from the Somme to Rheims all the 3rd battalions which constituted the local reserves of sectors: they obtained thus about 13 battalions belonging to 8 different Army Corps.' Lieut.-Col. Corda: *La Guerre Mondiale*, p. 174.

German Divisions Engaged.

July 1	7
July 1-9	2 more.
July 10-21	5 more.
July 21-31	2 more.

Total .. 16

officers published show how numbers and reserves are stinted, and how much is expected of every unit engaged. The impression which these diaries produce is of lavish use of superior numbers on the British side and rather callous sacrifice of very inferior forces on the German; in other words, they are maintaining their defence 'on the cheap,' and by minor expedients of reinforcement.

3. Assuming however that as many as the equivalent of fifteen German divisions have at one time or another been engaged in this battle against, say, thirty British divisions, how has the proportion of loss fallen on the two armies after the first shock?

If out of thirty British divisions put through the mill we have lost in the second phase 90,000, the Germans at

Actual
British and
German
Losses.

the same rate would have lost on fifteen divisions engaged about 45,000. This would make the totals to date :

British ...	...	...	...	150,000
Germans	...	...	...	65,000 ¹

This is probably more favourable to us than the truth.

4. Leaving *personnel* and coming to ground gained, we have not conquered in a month's fighting as much ground as we were expected to gain in the first two hours. We have not advanced 3 miles in the direct line at any point. We have only penetrated to that depth on a front of 8,000 or 10,000 yards. Penetration upon so narrow a front is quite useless for the purpose of breaking the line. It would be fatal to advance through a gap of this small size, which could be swept by a cross-fire of artillery. We are therefore now trying to broaden the gap by attacking sideways to the north. This is a very slow business. In four weeks we have progressed less than a mile. Unless a gap of at least 20 miles can be opened, no large force could be put

¹ These figures give a proportion of British to German losses of 2·3 to 1. Sir Douglas Haig, in his final despatch upon the Somme, committed himself to the following positive assertion : ' There is nevertheless sufficient evidence to place it beyond doubt that the enemy's losses in men and material have been very considerably higher than those of the Allies.' *

Colonel Boraston has now admitted the miscalculation which was made. ' Such figures as are now available,' he writes, ' do not bear out this view so far as the British front is concerned. The total British casualties on the Western front between July 1 and November 19, 1916, were some 463,000. A calculation based on German returns made available since the Armistice, state the German casualties incurred opposite the British during this period as about 218,000.' † Making an allowance, which is certainly reasonable, for casualties on both sides on the quiet sectors, Colonel Boraston states the actual British casualties in the Battle of the Somme at about 410,000 and the German casualties against them at 180,000. This yields the proportion of 2·27 British casualties to 1 German, or almost exactly the estimate of my memorandum.

The Headquarters Staff estimates dated August 1 placed the German loss in July at ' certainly not less than 130,000 men,' as against my estimate of 65,000 at the same date. The *Reichsarchiv's* returns give the figure for July on the whole British front of 59,493. The British Monthly Returns show a British total of 196,000 for July. Deducting one-eighth from both for casualties on the quiet sectors, we reach the figures of German loss in July 52,000, and British 171,000.

* *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches*, p. 52.

† *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, 1915-18, p. 149.

through. Even then it would have to fight a 'manœuvre battle' for which neither its training nor the experience of its staffs has prepared it, under very adverse conditions.

Criticism of
Results.

But the month that has passed has enabled the enemy to make whatever preparations behind his original lines he may think necessary. He is already defending a 500-mile front in France alone, and the construction of extra lines about 10 miles long to loop in the small sector now under attack is no appreciable strain on his labour or trench stores. He could quite easily by now have converted the whole countryside in front of our attack into successive lines of defence and fortified posts. What should we have done in the same time in similar circumstances? Anything he has left undone in this respect is due only to his confidence. A very powerful hostile artillery has now been assembled against us, and this will greatly aggravate the difficulties of further advance.

Nor are we making for any point of strategic or political consequence. Verdun at least would be a trophy—to which sentiment on both sides has become mistakenly attached. But what are Péronne and Bapaume, even if we were likely to take them? The open country towards which we are struggling by inches is capable of entrenched defence at every step, and is utterly devoid of military significance. There is no question of breaking the line, of 'letting loose the cavalry in the open country behind,' or of inducing a general withdrawal of the German armies in the West. No *local* strategic advantages of any kind have been reaped or can be expected.

The tactical form of the attack seems open to comment. Surprise—which played a vital part in the Russian victories and in the French attack—was wholly lacking. Nor was there that *overwhelming* concentration of artillery on particular points which characterized the German operations against Verdun. The sector selected for assault was one where the chalky ground enabled very deep entrenchments and dug-outs to be made, and was therefore far less adapted to the first employment of our new and very powerful artillery than some other portions of the front.

In *personnel* the results of the operation have been disastrous; in *terrain* they have been absolutely barren. And, although our brave troops on a portion of the front, mocking their losses and ready to make every sacrifice, are at the moment elated by the small advances made and the capture of prisoners and *souvenirs*, the ultimate moral effect will be disappointing. From every point of view, therefore, the British offensive *per se* has been a

Criticism
of Results.

great failure. With twenty times the shell, and five times the guns, and more than double the losses, the gains have but little exceeded those of Loos. And how was Loos viewed in retrospect?

6. It remains to consider the effects of this tremendous and most valiant effort on the general situation in the West and other theatres.

It is too early to say whether the British offensive had forced the enemy to suspend during its continuance his costly attacks on Verdun. As soon as our offensive is definitely mastered it will be open to him either to renew them or to use his successful defence against us as a cloak or an excuse for getting out of the job. No doubt the French are pleased. Having suffered so much themselves in blood, they think it is only fair we should suffer too. Their own attack on our right was a fairly profitable operation. This is the solitary advantage in the West.

No important advances or captures were made by the Russians after the opening of the Somme Battle.

Nor can it be claimed that our offensive was necessary to the Russian successes in the East. Their greatest success was gained largely by surprise before we had begun. We could have held the Germans on our front just as well by threatening an offensive as by making one. By cutting the enemy's wire, by bombardments, raiding and general activity at many unexpected points begun earlier and kept up later, we could have made it impossible for him to withdraw any appreciable force.

If the French were pressed at Verdun we could have taken over more line and thus liberated reinforcements.

7. So long as an army possesses a strong offensive power, it rivets its adversary's attention. But when the kick is out of it, when the long-saved-up effort has been expended, the enemy's anxiety is relieved, and he recovers his freedom of movement. This is the danger into which we are now drifting. We are using up division after division—not only those originally concentrated for the attack, but many taken from all parts of the line. After being put through the mill and losing perhaps half their infantry and two-thirds of their infantry officers, these shattered divisions will take several months to recover, especially as they will in many cases have to go into the trenches at once.

Thus the pent-up energies of the army are being dissipated, and if the process is allowed to go on, the enemy will not be under the need of keeping so many troops on our front as heretofore. He will then be able to restore or sustain the situation against Russia.

W. S. C.

August 1, 1916.

The statements in this memorandum were resented and repudiated both in the Cabinet and at General Headquarters, to which a copy soon found its way. There is no doubt that I did not make sufficient allowance for the compulsion to an offensive exercised by the blind movement of events. The facts were however only too true.

Soothing
Informa-
tion.

I have thought it right to thrash this controversy out in detail, to vindicate the claim which I make that I pass no important criticisms on the conduct of commanders in the light of after knowledge unless there exists documentary proof that substantially the same criticisms were put on record before or during the event and while every point was disputed and unknowable.

Sir Douglas Haig was not at this time well served by his advisers in the Intelligence Department of General Headquarters. The temptation to tell a Chief in a great position the things he most likes to hear is one of the commonest explanations of mistaken policy. An Emperor, a Commander-in-Chief, even a Prime Minister in peace or war, is in the main surrounded by smiling and respectful faces. Most people who come in contact with him in times of strain feel honoured by contact with so much power or in sympathy with the bearer of such heavy burdens. They are often prompted to use smooth processes, to mention some favourable item, to leave unsaid some ugly misgiving or some awkward contradiction. Thus the outlook of the leader on whose decision fateful events depend is usually far more sanguine than the brutal facts admit.

In political life there are many correctives: there is no walk so crowded with candid friends as Parliament. Apart from this, there is in time of peace organized opposition which with tireless industry assembles all the worst possible facts, draws from them the most alarming conclusions, and imputes the most unworthy motives. But the head of a great army in time of war has no such balancing apparatus. His power over his subordinates is practically absolute. Their loyalty, their sense of discipline, lead them to try to win his favour, or at least to spare his feelings, on every occasion. A sign of displeasure on his part at some objectionable piece of news might easily be interpreted by a

Inexorable
Forces.

subordinate as a wish to be freed from such inflictions. The whole habit of mind of a military staff is based upon subordination of opinion. It is not every councillor who, like the Bastard in King John, will say to his sovereign :

But if you be afeared to hear the worst,
Then let the worst unheard fall on your head.'

Yet when events are surveyed in retrospect, it does not seem just to throw the reproach of this battle upon Sir Douglas Haig. The esoteric Buddhists believe that at the end of each life a new being is created, heir to the faults or the virtues of his forerunner. The tragedies of 1916 had been decreed by the events of 1915. The failure of the Allied Governments in that year to effect the destruction of Turkey and the union of the Balkans against the Central Powers left open no favourable means of action. The French agony at Verdun compelled a British relieving counter-attack in France, before the new British armies, and particularly their vastly expanded artillery, were sufficiently trained to save the assaulting troops the heaviest loss. The Tanks, though already conceived, had yet to be born and reared. Resources did not exist sufficient to mount simultaneously several offensives along the battle front, thus leaving the enemy uncertain to the last moment of the true point of attack. Indispensable preparation destroyed equally indispensable surprise. Yet the call to attack was peremptory. Delay was impossible. Sir Douglas Haig, like all the Commanders on the Western Front, would no doubt, had he been responsible, have opposed the great turning movement in the south-east of Europe which was possible in 1915 and the consequences of which alone could have yielded decisive results in 1916. He was also confident and convinced of breaking the German front upon the Somme. But had he been as reluctant as he was ardent to attack the German positions, he could not have remained idle. Inexorable forces carried rulers and ruled along together as the wheels of Fate revolved.

Nevertheless the campaign of 1916 on the Western Front was from beginning to end a welter of slaughter, which after the issue was determined left the British and French armies

weaker in relation to the Germans than when it opened, while the actual battle fronts were not appreciably altered, and except for the relief of Verdun, which relieved the Germans no less than the French, no strategic advantage of any kind had been gained. The German unwisdom in attacking Verdun was more than cancelled in French casualties, and almost cancelled in the general strategic sphere by the heroic prodigality of the French defence. The loss in prestige which the Germans sustained through their failure to take Verdun was to be more than counterbalanced by their success in another theatre while all the time they kept their battle front unbroken on the Somme.

Glory of the
Troops.

But this sombre verdict, which it seems probable posterity will endorse in still more searching terms, in no way diminishes the true glory of the British Army. A young army, but the finest we have ever marshalled; improvised at the sound of the cannonade, every man a volunteer, inspired not only by love of country but by a widespread conviction that human freedom was challenged by military and Imperial tyranny, they grudged no sacrifice however unfruitful and shrank from no ordeal however destructive. Struggling forward through the mire and filth of the trenches, across the corpse-strewn crater fields, amid the flaring, crashing, blasting barrages and murderous machine-gun fire, conscious of their race, proud of their cause, they seized the most formidable soldiery in Europe by the throat, slew them and hurled them unceasingly backward. If two lives or ten lives were required by their commanders to kill one German, no word of complaint ever rose from the fighting troops. No attack however forlorn, however fatal, found them without ardour. No slaughter however desolating prevented them from returning to the charge. No physical conditions however severe deprived their commanders of their obedience and loyalty. Martyrs not less than soldiers, they fulfilled the high purpose of duty with which they were imbued. The battlefields of the Somme were the graveyards of Kitchener's Army. The flower of that generous manhood which quitted peaceful civilian life in every kind of workaday occupation, which came at the call of

Glory of the
Troops.

Britain, and as we may still hope, at the call of humanity, and came from the most remote parts of her Empire, was shorn away for ever in 1916. Unconquerable except by death, which they had conquered, they have set up a monument of native virtue which will command the wonder, the reverence and the gratitude of our island people as long as we endure as a nation among men.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROUMANIAN DISASTER

Roumania declares War—Fall of Falkenhayn—Hindenburg and Ludendorff—The Usurpation of the German General Staff—The Roumanian Opportunity gone—Rash Precautions—The Salonica Factor—Sarrail's Offensive—Jeopardy of Roumania—Disposition of her Armies—Russian Misgivings—Turturkai—The Closing Jaws—The Common Woe—The Autumn at Verdun—Nivelle and Mangin—Douaumont, October 24.

WE have seen how easily at the beginning of 1916 Roumania in her isolated position could have been induced or compelled to join the Teutonic Powers. We have seen how Falkenhayn, by turning to the west towards France and allowing Austria to do the same towards Italy, had relieved Roumania from adverse pressure and enabled her to preserve for another six months her attitude of ambiguous watchfulness. Events of a decided character were now to take place.

Roumania
declares
War.

At the end of August the second of the two great catastrophes which Falkenhayn's un wisdom had prepared fell upon the Central Empires. Roumania declared war. Although this danger had been approaching since Brusiloff's victory at the beginning of June, and important precautionary measures taken to guard against it, the actual declaration came much sooner than the German Government had expected, and fell as a shock upon German public opinion. A spontaneous movement of anger and disgust swept across the German Empire. The position of Germany was indeed more critical at this juncture than at any other period of the war until the final collapse. The Battle of Verdun was still making enormous inroads upon German resources, and a most serious moral defeat impended there. The Battle of the Somme was in full blast. The British, undeterred by their losses, continued to throw fresh divisions into the

Fall of
Falkenhayn.

struggle, and to launch their formidable attacks at brief intervals. The strain upon the Germans in the West was intense. The sense of failure at Verdun, and of being slowly overpowered and worn down by superior forces on the Somme, had affected the morale of their troops. Physical exhaustion and battle losses had reduced the German reserves to the slenderest proportions, and many more weeks of crisis and uncertainty lay between the hard-pressed front and the shield of winter. Meanwhile the failure of Austria was glaring. The whole Southern front in the East was still in a state of flux. The Russian tide rolled forward; no limits could yet be assigned to its advance. Scores of thousands of Czech troops had eagerly surrendered to the enemy, and were being enrolled bodily as a separate army corps in the Russian ranks. The Italian counter-offensive on the Isonzo was developing. The whole resisting power of the Austro-Hungarian Empire quivered on the verge of collapse. At this moment a fresh, brave and well-trained army of 500,000 Roumanians was thrown into the adverse scale, and entered the conflict in that very theatre where the Teutonic Powers were weakest and most vulnerable. The vital granaries and oil-fields of Roumania were lost, and even the great Hungarian Plain itself was in dire peril. All the time the pressure of the blockade sapped the vitality of the German masses, and hampered and complicated at a thousand points the manufacture of war material.

In this dark and almost desperate hour the Emperor, interpreting the mood of the German people, turned to the great twin captains of war who had defended the Eastern marches so long against heavy odds, and on whose brows still shone the lustre of Tannenberg. On August 28, the morrow of the Roumanian declaration, Falkenhayn was notified by Count Von Lyncker, head of the Emperor's Military Cabinet, that His Majesty had decided to summon Hindenburg and Ludendorff to his presence. Rightly accepting this intimation as dismissal, Falkenhayn resigned forthwith; and that same evening Hindenburg as Chief of the Staff, and Ludendorff as First Quartermaster-General¹

¹ In the German Army the deputies of the Chief of the General Staff bore the old title of Quartermaster-General.

with equal powers, assumed the supreme direction of the Central Empires in the war.

Hindenburg
and Luden-
dorff.

What are the relations between these two men? Hindenburg has described them as those of a happy marriage. 'In such a relationship,' he writes,¹ 'how can a third party clearly distinguish the merits of the individuals? They are one in thought and action, and often what the one says is only the expression of the wishes and feelings of the other. After I had learnt the worth of General Ludendorff, and that was soon, I realized that one of my principal tasks was as far as possible to give free scope to the intellectual powers, the almost superhuman capacity for work and untiring resolution of my Chief of Staff, and if necessary clear the way for him, the way in which our common desires and our common goal pointed. . . . The harmony of our military and political convictions formed the basis for our joint views as to the proper use of our resources. Differences of opinion were easily reconciled, without our relations being disturbed by a feeling of forced submission on either side.'

The old Field-Marshal was uplifted by his patriotism and character above jealousy. His great age and the vast changes which had taken place in warfare since he had passed his military prime led him willingly to leave the initiative, the preparation and the execution almost entirely to his volcanic colleague, while he himself in full agreement on the largest decisions came in with ponderous weight to clear obstacles and opposition from the path. Throughout the struggle an absolute unity was presented.

But when we look beneath appearances to the facts, there can be no doubt that Ludendorff managed everything and that Hindenburg was chosen largely to enable him to manage everything. It was in Ludendorff's brain that the great decisions were taken. It was under his competent hand that the whole movement and control of the German armies, and of much more than the armies, proceeded. Ludendorff was the man of the German General Staff. This military priesthood was throughout the dominating and driving power of Germany, not only through the fifty-

¹ *Out of my Life*. Marshal von Hindenburg, p. 84.

The Usur-
pation of
the German
General
Staff.

two months of the war, but to a very large extent in the situation that preceded it and brought it about. The representatives of the General Staff were bound together by the closest ties of professional comradeship and common doctrine. They were to the rest of the Army what the Jesuits in their greatest period had been to the Church of Rome. Their representatives at the side of every Commander and at Headquarters spoke a language and preserved confidences of their own. The German Generals of Corps and Armies, Army-Group Commanders, nay, Hindenburg himself were treated by this confraternity, to an extent almost incredible, as figureheads, and frequently as nothing more. 'The General Staff,' writes General von Moser,¹ 'established an underground control of operations behind the backs of the commanding Generals. It led one prominent General to declare, "I am fighting the enemy and the General Staff."' On December 3, 1917, in the Cambrai battle, Moser himself relates that as Corps Commander he suggested to the Second Army the recapture of Bourslon Wood the next day. To his surprise his project was disapproved and the date fixed for the 9th. He subsequently ascertained that one of his own General Staff officers had spoken on the telephone to the Second Army and argued against the attack on the 4th and in favour of postponing it to the 9th.

Every one will remember the extraordinary incident of the visit of Colonel Hentsch to the various Army Headquarters during the Battle of the Marne in 1914 as General Staff representative of the Supreme Command; how on the morning of September 9 he settled all vital matters with Bülow's Chief of the Staff while the old man was still in bed; and how at noon at Kluck's headquarters he gave his orders to the Staff Officer, Kuhl, and neither mentioned Kluck nor asked to see him. Similarly Generals von Lossberg (C.G.S. Sixth Army) and von Kuhl (C.G.S. Rupprecht's group of Armies) speak always, as the records show, in their own names and not those of Sixt von Armin or Rupprecht, whom they neither quote nor appear to con-

¹ *Ernsthafte Plaudereien über den Welt Krieg.* General von Moser.

sult. A British Staff Officer, whatever the facts, would at least have said, 'The Chief or Army Commander wishes.' But behind the scenes of the German General Staff all these formalities are dropped. The staffs arrange everything without a word about the authority, opinions or desires of their generals. It is the General Staff which conducts the operations, gives decisions and notifies them to the subordinate formations. Ludendorff throughout appears as the uncontested master. In his numerous conversations with the Chief of the Staff of the Fourth Army, the name of Hindenburg is never mentioned to justify or to support a decision.¹

The Rou-
manian
Opportunity
gone.

This in no way detracts from the fame of Hindenburg, who yielded himself with magnanimity to a process which he was sure was in the best interests of his King and Country. But it is necessary to state what is believed to be the truth.

* * * * *

The golden opportunity for which Roumania had so long watched had not only come. It had gone.

As soon as the extent of the Russian victory was plainly apparent, the Cabinet of Bratiano definitely decided to enter the war. The long period of perplexity, hesitation, and bargaining had reached its conclusion. Now or never was the moment for Roumania to strike with all her strength for her national ambition and for the unity and integrity of the Roumanian peoples. Once this decision was taken, not a day should have been lost in acting upon it. While Brusiloff's armies were rolling forward in Galicia, while the Bohemian troops of Austria were eagerly surrendering by scores of thousands, while the enormous booty in prisoners, arms and material was being collected by the astonished Russian soldiery, and before the German troops could be drawn from the north and the west to re-establish the shattered front—then was the hour for Roumanian intervention. A general mobilization of the Roumanian Army, if ordered about June 10, would have enabled considerable Roumanian forces to have come into action before the end

¹ The above facts are taken from the French translation of the captured documents of the German Fourth Army, 9-30 April, 1918, and from a French review of them.

Rash Pre-
cautions.

of that month and while the whole south-eastern front of the Central Powers was in complete disorder. The consequences of this must have been far-reaching and might perhaps have proved decisive.

The habit of bargaining, of waiting upon events, of trying to make hazard sure and wild adventure prudent, had become so deeply engrained in Bratiano's policy that nearly two months were wasted in negotiations. Before they would commit themselves, the Roumanian Government must have everything settled, must be promised the highest rewards and guaranteed a practically complete immunity. Military conventions regulating the contingent movements of Russian troops and of the Salonica armies, and the supply of arms and munitions, not less than the political, financial and territorial issues, were laboriously and meticulously debated by telegraph with the various Allied Cabinets. The British and French Governments—high in their hopes of impending victory on the Somme—were suddenly eager to secure Roumanian aid at almost any price. Russia, for reasons which will presently be understood, appeared less ardent. Yet it was with Russia that all the principal military arrangements had perforce to be settled. In these discussions the rest of June and the whole of July slipped rapidly away.

Meanwhile Falkenhayn was not idle. Everywhere in the east the German troops stood immovable against the Russians, and from all parts of the German lines reinforcements were scraped together and hurried to the scene of Brusiloff's incursion. By the end of June the Russian advance had slackened, and by the middle of July the Austro-German front was again continuous and more or less stabilized. The gravest apprehensions upon the attitude of Roumania were justly entertained in Vienna, Berlin and Sofia. And during June and July Austrian and Bulgarian forces were steadily and to the fullest extent possible brought into precautionary positions near the Roumanian frontiers.

It was not until August 27 that Roumania declared war on Austria-Hungary, ordered general mobilization and prepared to launch her armies into Transylvania. She had exacted the following military stipulations from the Allies:

first, energetic action by the Russians against the Austrians, particularly in the Bukovina; secondly, two Russian divisions and a cavalry division to be sent on the first day of mobilization into the Dobruja; and thirdly, an offensive by the Allies from Salonica simultaneously with the Roumanian entry into the war.

Not all these measures and their political counterparts put together were worth the month or six weeks of precious time that had been lost in their discussion. Prudence had become imprudence, and safety had been jeopardized by care and forethought. The Teutonic Powers had escaped from the ruin with which the Brusiloff disaster had menaced them before they were called upon to bear the assault of a new antagonist. And this assault was no longer unexpected, but foreseen and so far as their resources allowed prepared against. Nevertheless the apparition in the field of Roumania with twenty-three organized divisions and with over 1,500,000 men capable of bearing arms, and the denial of the Roumanian supplies of corn and oil, seemed both to friend and foe to constitute at this moment one of the most terrible blows which Germany and her reeling partner had yet been called upon to encounter.

* * * * *

While the German and Bulgarian storm-clouds are gathering around Roumania, we must examine the situation on the Salonica front, from which Roumania had been led to expect timely and immediate succour.

The presence of the Allied Army based on Salonica was one of the determining factors in the decision of Roumania. Nearly 400,000 men of five nations—French, British and Serbian, an Italian division and a Russian Brigade—were now scattered along and behind the front established at the foot of the Bulgarian mountain wall. Roumania had stipulated that this army should begin a general offensive against the Bulgarians, if possible a fortnight before, and at the worst simultaneously with, her entry into the war. Both the British and French Governments had agreed to this. Accordingly on Joffre had fallen the duty of ordering General Sarrail who commanded the Allied Army to set his forces in motion not later than August 10. 'At the

Sarrail's
Offensive.

moment which is judged opportune the Army of the Orient will attack, with all forces united, the Allied enemy along the Greek frontier, and in case of success will pursue them in the general direction of Sofia.' This ambitious command did not correspond with the realities. The British Commander-in-Chief, General Milne, reported that an offensive against the Bulgarians would not succeed. He thought that determined troops could hold the Bulgarian position for ever. The extent of the front, the lack of adequate forces, the difficulties of co-operation between three nationalities, the doubtful quality of the Serbians on the exposed left flank, and the inadequate heavy artillery were among the adverse points on which he dwelt. Sir William Robertson recorded his opinion that the Bulgarians were fine fighters in their own country, that the Serbians had not recovered from their disaster, and that not a single British officer was in favour of the enterprise. The British Government had no confidence in General Sarrail, and friction was continuous between him and his British colleagues.

These pessimistic views were not entirely justified by the subsequent facts. The Serbians, after reorganization, training and feeding, showed themselves when the time came implacable troops. But it is remarkable that the British Cabinet, in the face of the reports submitted to them, should nevertheless have joined with the French in encouraging Roumania to count upon an effective offensive by the Salonica Army. There was indeed no means by which the Allied forces in the Balkans could prevent Bulgaria from throwing her main strength against Roumania. In the upshot it was arranged that General Milne with the British should guard Sarrail's right flank in an active defensive, while Sarrail himself was forced to reduce the general offensive ordered by Joffre to demonstrations and an enveloping attack by the Serbians. Even so he had to feed eight divisions along a single line of railway. On the whole front he could muster no more than 14 divisions against 23 Bulgarian and German divisions fortified on strong mountain lines. The date even of these limited operations was retarded until the end of September.

Meanwhile the German-Bulgarians struck first, and though repulsed elsewhere reached the sea and captured a Greek Division at Kavala on September 18. In the circumstances it was remarkable that Sarrail should have succeeded to the extent of taking Monastir. On the actual front of attack the forces were almost equal; each mustered 190,000 men and 800 or 900 guns. But the achievement in no way influenced the struggle in which the fate of Roumania was decided. Had all the faults of temperament and character which are charged against General Sarrail been

Jeopardy of
Roumania.



replaced by equally undisputed virtues, no better result could have been obtained.

* * * * *

The perilous position of Roumania became apparent from the moment of her declaration of war. The main portion of the Kingdom consisted of a tongue of land about three hundred miles long and a hundred wide between the wall of the Transylvanian Alps on the north and the broad Danube on the south. About the centre of this tongue lay the capital, Bucharest. Beyond the mountains gathered the Austrians and the Germans; behind the Danube the Bulgarians crouched. Four months sufficed to crack Roumania like a nut between these pincers.

A word may be said about each of the Roumanian frontiers. The Danube, which here flows for a great part of its course through a deep trough in the plain and is in many

Disposition
of her
Armies.

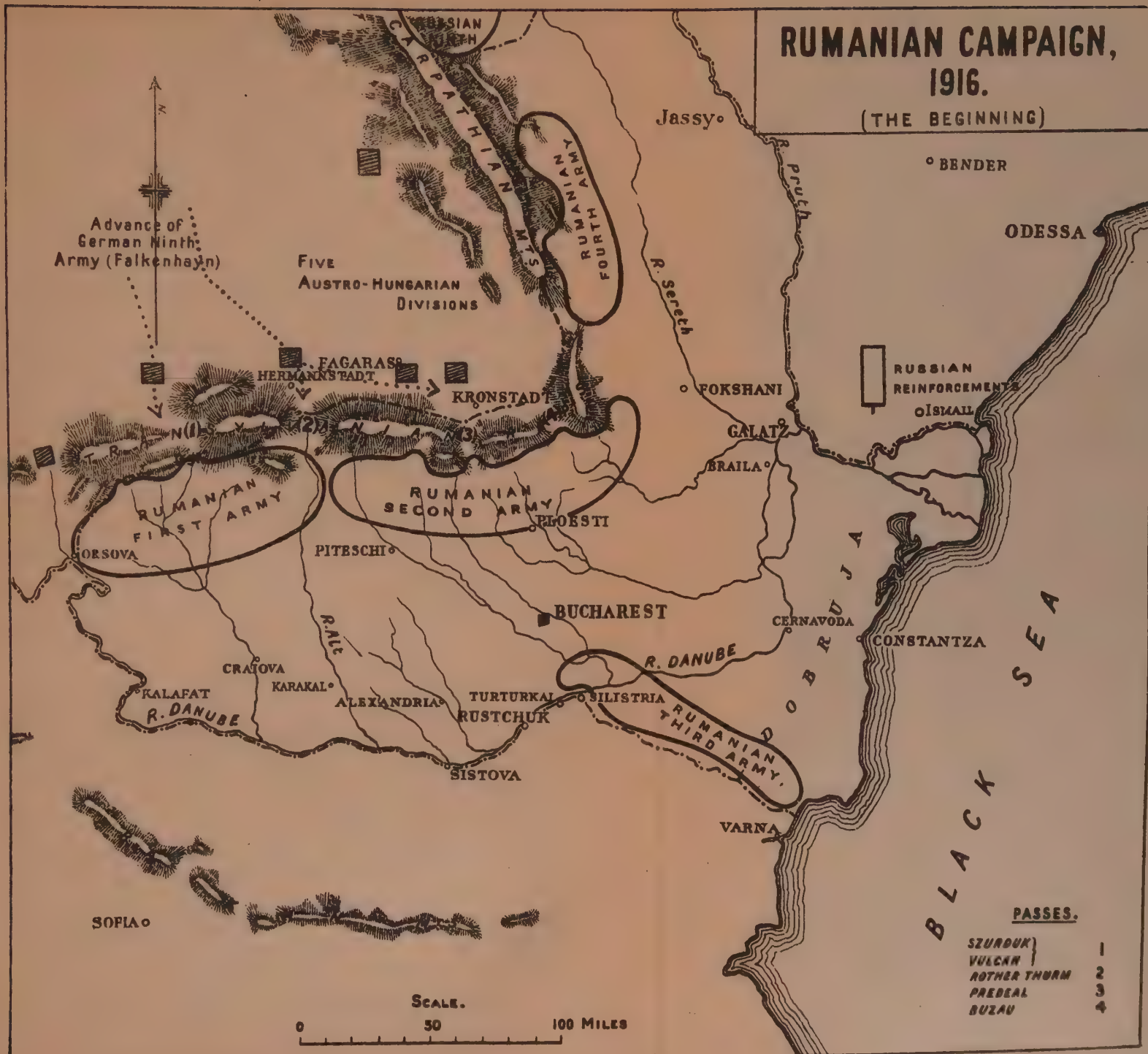
places nearly a mile wide, appeared a trusty barrier. The principal passages at Sistova, Turturkai and Silistria were guarded by fortresses reckoned formidable before the advent of the heavy howitzer. As the Danube descends to its mouth, it encloses between its waters and the Black Sea the province of the Dobruja which Roumania had at the end of the second Balkan war seized without fighting from prostrate Bulgaria. An advance into the Dobruja, left hand on the Danube, right hand on the seashore, stirred every Bulgarian ambition and cut at the very root of the Roumanian tongue.

The mountain range to the north was a more effective defence than the line of the Danube. The Transylvanian Alps rise to a height of six or seven thousand feet by three tiers of forest, of grassy upland and finally of rocky but rounded summits. This rampart is pierced from north to south by four major passes—sudden clefts two or three thousand feet deep and many miles in length, traversed by inferior roads of which the most westerly is the one which follows the Vulkan pass. The Transylvanian Alps turn at their eastern extremity through more than a right angle into the Carpathians, between which and the Russian frontier on the river Pruth lies Moldavia, the northern province of Roumania. Such was the theatre of the new war.

Roumania mobilized on August 27 twenty-three divisions, of which ten were well trained, five less well trained, and the remainder reserve formations, aggregating over 500,000 men. The Roumanian Army was however weak in artillery and ill supplied with ammunition. Her principal arsenal had exploded mysteriously a few days before her entry into the war. She was ill equipped with field telephones, and possessed very few aeroplanes, no trench mortars and no poison gas. Her Statesmen seem at first to have cherished the hope—fantastic in view of the past—that Bulgaria would not declare war upon her. When this hope was dispelled on September 1, Roumania continued to trust to the intervention of General Sarraïl to hold the Bulgarian strength on the Salonica front. She also hoped that the Germans would be too hard pressed to spare any

RUMANIAN CAMPAIGN, 1916.

(THE BEGINNING)



substantial forces, and she relied upon definite promises of strong and prompt Russian aid. The Roumanian forces were divided into four armies, of which the Third guarded the Danube and the Dobruja, the First and Second held the passes through the Transylvanian Alps, and the Fourth, hoping later for co-operation from the Second, invaded Transylvania through the Carpathians. A central Reserve of 50,000 men guarded Bucharest.

Russian
Misgivings.

At the outset there were in Transylvania only five tired Austrian divisions, but in the early part of September four German divisions were already approaching. Of these troops Falkenhayn was himself placed in command on September 6. Beyond the Danube and towards the Dobruja three Bulgarian divisions and a cavalry division and part of a German division from the Salonica front were assembled under the redoubtable Mackensen.

Although the Roumanians had a large numerical superiority, it was impossible to study the war map without anxiety. Mr. Lloyd George, then Secretary of State for War, explained to me fully the situation; and after we had mutually alarmed each other in a long talk at Walton Heath, he wrote a serious though belated warning to the Prime Minister. Sarraïl and the Salonica army could not be got into motion. There remained only the Russian aid, and here again fortune was perverse. The treaty which the old King of Roumania had made before the war with Austria-Hungary had led Russia to regard Roumania as a potential enemy. In consequence the south Russian railway system withered away towards the Roumanian frontier, and there was actually a gap of twenty miles between the Russian railhead at Reni and the nearest Roumanian line at Galatz. It was therefore impossible for Russia to come with any speed to the succour of her new Ally. Alexeïeff and the very able Russian Staff understood the Roumanian problem far better than the impatient western Allies, and their misgivings had been apparent in the lukewarm attitude of Russia towards Roumanian intervention.

Jubilation at the accession of a new Ally was still resounding through the French and British Press when startling news arrived. On September 1 Mackensen in-

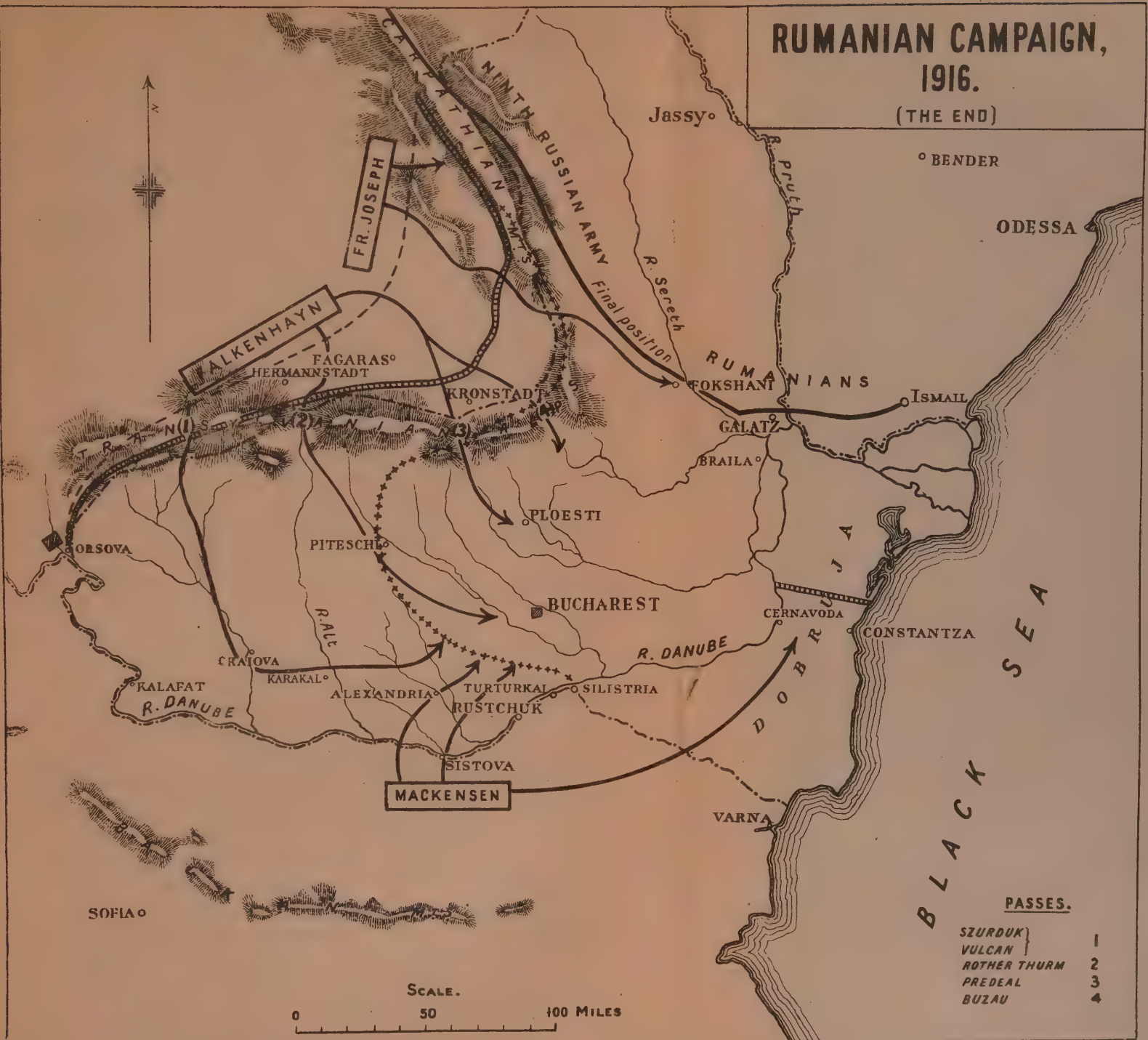
Turturkai.

vaded the Dobruja. On September 6, with the Bulgarian Army and German howitzers he smashed the Danubian fortress of Turturkai and captured 25,000 Roumanians and 100 guns. Swiftly advancing through the Dobruja, Mackensen had by the end of September come almost abreast of Constanza on the Black Sea, taking the abandoned fortress of Silistria on his way. By the third week in October he had taken Constanza. Leaving half his army to defend the conquered territory by an entrenched line from the Danube to the sea, he brought the remainder, strengthened by a Turkish division and an additional Bulgarian division, across the Danube opposite Bucharest, which he threatened at a distance of barely forty miles. This menace was not without its object. While the Bulgarian invasion of the Dobruja had been proceeding, Falkenhayn was probing the passes of the Transylvanian Alps and seeking incessantly—now here, now there—to force his way through. The First and Second Roumanian armies however maintained a stout resistance, while the Fourth, which had debouched from the Carpathians, continued to drive the Austrians westward. But the disaster at Turturkai, the invasion of the Dobruja, and finally Mackensen's menace to Bucharest, had already absorbed the Roumanian central reserve of 50,000 men. General Averescu, placed in command of the southern front, peremptorily demanded that the Roumanian Fourth Army should be recalled from Transylvania, that the Second and Third Armies should be reduced to the minimum compatible with holding the passes, and that the whole strength of Roumania should be thrown against the Bulgarians. This at any rate was a military plan. It was resisted with equal vehemence by General Présan who commanded in the north. The controversy was acute, and the debate well balanced. In the end, as would be expected, a compromise was reached whereby General Présan continued to invade Transylvania with forces too weak to be effective; and General Averescu obtained enough troops from the armies holding the passes to endanger the defence, but not enough to overcome the Bulgarians.

Roumania had now been at war for two months, and by

RUMANIAN CAMPAIGN, 1916.

(THE END)



the beginning of November five additional German divisions and two cavalry divisions had joined Falkenhayn's army. Thus powerfully reinforced, he attacked the Vulkan pass in earnest. By November 26 he had forced his way through and entered the Roumanian plain, descending the valley of the Jiu and incidentally cutting off the Roumanian forces holding the tip of the tongue near Orsova. This movement compromised in succession the defence of the other passes. By the end of November, Falkenhayn had joined hands with Mackensen from across the Danube; and on December 6, after a well-contested three-days' battle between Falkenhayn's and Mackensen's armies, together amounting to fifteen divisions, and what was left of the Roumanian forces, he entered Bucharest in triumph. The Roumanians, defending themselves stubbornly, retreated eastward towards the considerable Russian Army which had now at last arrived. Notwithstanding torrential rains and winter conditions, Falkenhayn and Mackensen followed apace. The roads ceased to exist. The troops were short of food and every necessity. Ludendorff, according to Falkenhayn, sent 'floods of telegrams, as superfluous as they were unpleasant,'¹ but neither winter clothing nor supplies. Still the Germans persevered, and after a series of stern battles mainly against Russian forces, reached the Sereth River on January 7. Here their advance ended. The tongue of Roumania had been torn out by its roots. There remained of that unhappy Kingdom only the northern province. In this narrow region around the town of Jassy what remained of the armies which four months before had entered the war so full of hope endured for many months privation and even famine, from which not only thousands of soldiers but far larger numbers of refugees perished lamentably. Thus did Roumania share in the end the hideous miseries of all the Balkan peoples.

How unteachable, how blinded by their passions are the races of men! The Great War, bringing tribulation to so many, offered to the Christian peoples of the Balkans their supreme opportunity. Others had to toil and dare and suffer. They had only to forgive and to unite. By a

¹ *Der Feldzug der 9 Armee, 1916-17, Part II., pp. 93-100.*

The Com-
mon Woe.
The Autumn
at Verdun.

single spontaneous realization of their common interests the Confederation of the Balkans would have become one of the great Powers of Europe, with Constantinople, under some international instrument, as its combined capital. A concerted armed neutrality followed by decisive intervention at the chosen moment against their common enemies, Turkey and Austria, could easily have given each individual State the major part of its legitimate ambitions, and would have given to all safety, prosperity and power. They chose instead to drink in company the corrosive cup of internecine vengeance. And the cup is not yet drained.

* * * * *

Meanwhile on the heights of Verdun new figures destined powerfully to sway the course of events began to emerge under the blast of the cannonade. Pétain's most successful commander was a certain General Nivelle, an Artillery officer who by courage and address had won his way from a modest station to the head of an Army Corps. Nivelle's fighting arm was a certain General Mangin, of whom some brief description is required. Mangin belonged to the French Colonial Army, and had made his name in Morocco and Tunis. He had led Marchand's advanced guard to Fashoda in 1898. Engaged at the head of a brigade in the opening days of the war, he had won distinction at Dinant and Charleroi. In the widespread breaking of incompetent leaders which followed the opening defeats of the French Army, Mangin succeeded to the command of a dispirited division from whose control a discredited figure had been removed. 'After having at our head,' wrote a young Royalist who served as a clerk on the staff of this division, 'a walking ruin, we actually possess one of the best generals of the French Army.'¹ Mangin was not to belie this reputation. Bronzed and sombre, thick black hair bristling, an aquiline profile with gleaming eyes and teeth; alive and active, furious, luxurious, privileged, acquisitive—a dozen motor-cars collected from all quarters, including the enemy, in his train as a simple Colonel of Brigade—reckless of all lives and of none more than his own, charging at the head of his troops, fighting rifle in

¹ *De Sauret la Honte, à Mangin le Boucher.* Henry Dutheil. p. 88.

hand when he could escape from his headquarters, thundering down the telephone implacable orders to his subordinates and when necessary defiance to his superiors, Mangin beaten or triumphant, Mangin the Hero or Mangin the Butcher as he was alternately regarded, became on the anvil of Verdun the fiercest warrior-figure of France.

Nivelle and
Mangin.

During the spring Pétain entrusted the direction of the most important operations to Nivelle, and Nivelle confided their execution in the main to Mangin. When in April after three months of battle Pétain was promoted from Verdun to the command of a group of armies, Nivelle, Mangin still in hand, succeeded to the direction of the struggle.

One of the earliest decisions of the Hindenburg-Ludendorff régime had been to arrest the Verdun offensive; and from the end of August, to the intense relief of the Crown Prince, the German armies before the fortress adopted a purely defensive attitude. The decision, wise in the disastrous circumstances, presented nevertheless a fine opportunity to the French. The long months of battle had left the German line wedge-shaped. The fort of Douaumont, in actual contact at the very tip, was at once the greatest and the nearest trophy for France. Nothing would set the seal of defeat upon the German effort at Verdun more dramatically than the recapture of Douaumont, famous all over the world. It was on this that Nivelle and Mangin set their hearts.

The preparations were long and thorough. 530 heavy pieces, including a new 16-inch Creusot battery, in addition to the ordinary artillery of the Verdun army, were concentrated upon the German salient—or a gun to every fifteen yards of the front to be attacked. The three divisions which were to make the assault were brought to the highest point of strength and efficiency and trained for more than a month behind the line in the exact parts each was to play. The bombardment began in the middle of October, and fell with fury on all the German defences and organizations. The chief target was the German artillery. By the 20th nearly a third of the German batteries had been put out of action. On the 22nd, at 2 p.m., the French fire on the

Douaumont,
October 24.

German front lines was suddenly lifted and the range lengthened. The stratagem was successful. Here then, thought the Germans, was the moment of assault. 158 German batteries, hitherto concealed, opened fire, betraying alike their own position and their system of defensive barrages. Of these 158 batteries only 90 remained in action when the true moment arrived.

Three fine days preceded the 24th of October, but on the day itself a dense fog overspread the ground. There was a moment of discussion at the French headquarters whether the attack should be postponed. But Mangin rightly judged that the fog hampered the defence at least as much as the attack. His view prevailed. The French trench mortars, secretly massed on an unprecedented scale—a new feature—opened a terrific fire on the German front line crouching in the shell holes to which their trenches were reduced ; and after two hours the French infantry, in the cold passion of calculation and devotion, marched upon their ancient foe. In two hours more all was over. The German wedge was bitten off, the tricolour flew again upon Fort Douaumont, and 6,000 German prisoners were in Mangin's cages. The 'corner-stone' of Verdun, as the Germans had precipitately called it, had been regained ; and the name of Verdun was registered in history as one of the greatest misfortunes of the German arms.

In this brilliant local victory there lay, as will soon be seen, the seeds of a memorable disappointment.

CHAPTER IX

THE INTERVENTION OF THE UNITED STATES

'Whereas the Imperial German Government have committed repeated acts of war against the Government and the people of the United States of America : Therefore be it resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled : That a state of war between the United States and the Imperial German Government which has been thrust upon the United States is hereby formally declared ; and that the President be, and he is hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against the Imperial German Government ; and to bring the conflict to a successful termination all the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States.'—Congressional Resolution of April 6, 1917.

Three Stupendous Events—Three Cardinal Mistakes—The U-boats and the Traditions of Sea Warfare—The German Logic—Tirpitz's Premature U-boat Attack—Its Repulse and British Counter-measures—The Chancellor restrains Tirpitz—The Winter Situation in Germany—Two Hundred U-boats—The Dire Decision—'If Victory Beckons'—The Fate of Russia—Her Amazing Recovery—Nicholas II—Limitations of the German Military Outlook—The Value of American Intervention—The American Standpoint—The Rigid Constitution—President Wilson—His Problems—His Efforts to abstain from War—Increasing Provocation—The final Rupture—America at War.

THE beginning of 1917 was marked by three stupendous events : the German declaration of unlimited U-boat war, the intervention of the United States, and the Russian revolution. Taken together these events constitute the second great climax of the war. The order in which they were placed was decisive. If the Russian revolution had occurred in January instead of in March, or if, alternatively, the Germans had waited to declare unlimited U-boat war until the summer, there would have been no unlimited U-boat war and consequently no intervention of the United States. If the Allies had been left to face the

Three
Stupendous
Events.

Three
Cardinal
Mistakes.

collapse of Russia without being sustained by the intervention of the United States, it seems certain that France could not have survived the year, and the war would have ended in a Peace by negotiation or, in other words, a German victory. Had Russia lasted two months less, had Germany refrained for two months more, the whole course of events would have been revolutionized. In this sequence we discern the footprints of Destiny. Either Russian endurance or German impatience was required to secure the entry of the United States, and both were forthcoming.

The total defeat of Germany was due to three cardinal mistakes: the decision to march through Belgium regardless of bringing Britain into the war; the decision to begin the unrestricted U-boat war regardless of bringing the United States into the war; and thirdly, the decision to use the German forces liberated from Russia in 1918 for a final onslaught in France. But for the first mistake they would have beaten France and Russia easily in a year; but for the second mistake they would have been able to make a satisfactory peace in 1917; but for the third mistake they would have been able to confront the Allies with an unbreakable front on the Meuse or on the Rhine, and to have made self-respecting terms as a price for abridging the slaughter. All these three errors were committed by the same forces, and by the very forces that made the military strength of the German Empire. The German General Staff, which sustained the German cause with such wonderful power, was responsible for all these three fatal decisions. Thus nations as well as individuals come to ruin through the over-exercise of those very qualities and faculties on which their dominion has been founded.

However long the controversy may last, there will never be any agreement between the belligerent nations on the rights or wrongs of the U-boat warfare. The Germans never understood, and never will understand, the horror and indignation with which their opponents and the neutral world regarded their attack. They believed sincerely that the outcry was only hypocrisy and propaganda. The law and custom of the sea were very old. They had grown up in the course of centuries, and although frequently broken

in the instance, had in the main stood the stress of many bitter conflicts between nations. To seize even an enemy merchant ship at sea was an act which imposed strict obligations on the captor. To make a neutral ship a prize of war stirred whole histories of international law. But between taking a ship and sinking a ship was a gulf. The captor of a neutral ship at sea had by long tradition been bound to bring his prize into harbour and judge her before the Prize Courts. To sink her incontinently was odious; to sink her without providing for the safety of the crew, to leave that crew to perish in open boats or drown amid the waves was in the eyes of all seafaring peoples a grisly act, which hitherto had never been practised deliberately except by pirates. Thus old seagoing nations, particularly Britain, France, Holland, Norway and the United States, saw in the U-boat war against merchant ships, and particularly neutral merchant ships, depth beyond depth of enormity. And indeed the spectacle of helpless merchant seamen, their barque shattered and foundering, left with hard intention by fellow-mariners to perish in the cruel sea, was hideous.

The U-boats
and the
Traditions
of Sea War-
fare.

But the Germans were new-comers on salt water. They cared little for all these ancient traditions of seafaring folk. Death for them was the same in whatever form it came to men. It ended in a more or less painful manner their mortal span. Why was it more horrible to be choked with salt water than with poison gas, or to starve in an open boat than to rot wounded but alive in No Man's Land? The British blockade treated the whole of Germany as if it were a beleaguered fortress, and avowedly sought to starve the whole population—men, women and children, old and young, wounded and sound—into submission. Suppose the issues had arisen on land instead of at sea; suppose large numbers of Americans and neutrals had carried food or shell into the zone of the armies under the fire of the German artillery; suppose their convoys were known to be traversing certain roads towards the front: who would have hesitated for a moment to overwhelm them with drum-fire and blast them from the face of the earth? Who ever hesitated to fire on towns and villages because help-

The German
Logic.
Tirpitz's
Premature
U-boat
Attack.

less and inoffensive non-combatants were gathered there? If they came within reach of the guns, they had to take their chance, and why should not this apply to the torpedoes too? Why should it be legitimate to slay a neutral or a non-combatant on land by cannon if he got in the way, and a hideous atrocity to slay the same neutral or non-combatant by torpedo on the seas? Where was the sense in drawing distinctions between the two processes? Policy might spread its web of calculation, but in logic the path was clear. Yes, we will if necessary kill everyone of every condition who comes within our power and hinders us from winning the war, and we draw no distinction between land and sea. Thus the German Naval Staff. But the neutrals took a different view.

The original driving power behind the U-boat attack on merchant ships was the rasping and energetic personality of Admiral von Tirpitz. We have already seen in Volume II the fate of his first efforts. On February 4, 1915, he had proclaimed that from February 18 onward 'every Allied merchant vessel found within the waters surrounding the British Isles would be destroyed without its being always possible to avoid dangers to the crews and passengers,' and that neutral ships would also be exposed to danger in the war zone. At that time Tirpitz had at his disposal no more than twenty to twenty-five suitable submarines, of which only one-third, say seven or eight, could be on duty at a time. Having regard to the enormous traffic and numerous harbours of the British Isles as well as to our defensive measures, we considered it certain that the effects of this attack would be comparatively unimportant to the volume of our trade. I therefore announced immediately that we would publish every week the sinkings of merchant vessels effected by the German submarines, together with the number of ships entering and leaving British ports. The result fully justified our confidence, and by May, 1915, Tirpitz's failure to impede sea traffic with such puny resources was apparent to all.

The anger of neutrals and the menacing attitude of the United States which the new form of sea warfare aroused, coupled with its feeble results in practice, convinced Ger-

man Emperor, Chancellor and Foreign Office after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and *Arabic* that Tirpitz was wrong and must be restrained. The operations of the U-boats were accordingly restricted by successive orders and hampered by vacillations of policy, and by the autumn of 1915 they died away altogether. The premature exposure with inadequate forces of this method of warfare was of immense service to Great Britain. Counter-measures of every kind and on the largest scale were from the beginning of 1915 set on foot by the Admiralty under my direction. Armed small craft were multiplied to an enormous extent, both by building and conversion, the arming of merchantmen was pressed forward, the manœuvres of decoy ships—the 'Q-boats,' of which more hereafter—were perfected, and every scientific device, offensive and defensive, against the submarines was made the object of ceaseless experiment and production. The first U-boat attack failed grotesquely, but the counter-measures which had been launched were continued at full speed by Mr. Balfour and his Board all through 1915 and 1916. To this perseverance after the danger had apparently passed away, we owe in great measure our ultimate salvation.

Its Repulse
and British
Counter-
measures.

In a speech which I made in the House of Commons while on leave from the front (March 7, 1916) I endeavoured to stimulate these precautions by a definite warning.

'In naval war particularly, you must always be asking about the enemy—what now, what next? You must always be seeking to penetrate what he will do, and your measures must always be governed and framed on the basis that he will do what you would least like him to do. My right hon. Friend (Mr. Balfour) showed that the late Board had surmounted some of the very serious and difficult dangers at the beginning of the War; but one he did not mention, the menace of the submarine attack on merchantmen, was overcome by measures taken this time last year of an extraordinary scale and complexity. But although the German submarine campaign has up to date been a great failure, and although it will probably continue to be a failure—here again you cannot afford to assume that it will not present itself in new and more difficult forms, and that new exertions and new inventions will not be demanded, and you must be ready with your new devices before the

The Chan-
cellor
restrains
Tirpitz.

enemy is ready with his, and your resourcefulness and developments must continually proceed upon a scale which exceeds the maximum you expect from him. I find it necessary to utter this word of warning, which for obvious reasons I should not proceed to elaborate.'

At this very time in the spring of 1916 Tirpitz renewed his pressure upon the German Chancellor to permit the resumption of the U-boat war. He marshalled all his forces for the assault on Bethmann-Hollweg. General von Falkenhayn was won over. Admiral von Holtzendorf was enthusiastic. Tirpitz himself in his memorandum of February, 1916, wrote:—

'Immediate and relentless recourse to the submarine weapon is absolutely necessary. Any further delay in the introduction of unrestricted warfare will give England time for further naval and economic defensive measures and cause us greater losses in the end, and endanger quick success. The sooner the campaign be opened, the sooner will success be realized, and the more rapidly and energetically will England's hope of defeating us by a war of exhaustion be destroyed. If we defeat England, we break the backbone of the hostile coalition.'¹

Tirpitz accosted the Emperor aggressively on February 23, 1916, and demanded a decision. The Emperor, who no doubt realized that pressure was being brought to bear upon him and his Chancellor from many quarters, summoned a meeting on March 6, from which he deliberately excluded Tirpitz. As the result of this meeting, at which the Chancellor, Falkenhayn and Holtzendorf were present, it was decided to postpone the opening of unrestricted U-boat war indefinitely. Orders which had been actually issued for beginning it on April 1 were cancelled. Tirpitz immediately requested his dismissal, which was accorded to him on March 17. The conflict was however maintained by the Naval Staff, and by Admiral Scheer.

There were available for a U-boat campaign in the spring of 1916 about fifty suitable vessels as against the twenty to twenty-five of the preceding year. Thus Tirpitz could have maintained less than twenty U-boats in constant action. Having regard to the progress of the British counter-

¹ *My Memoirs*: Von Tirpitz, Vol. II, p. 419.

measures, there is no reason to believe that this larger number would have imposed a serious strain upon our oversea supplies. But behind the fifty U-boats in commission no less than one hundred and fifty-seven were building within the German financial year 1916. When these were completed by the beginning of 1917, the issue would for the first time be of a grave character. The attack of twenty-five U-boats in February, 1915, was absurd; the attack by fifty U-boats in February, 1916, would easily have been defeated; but the attack of two hundred U-boats in February, 1917, raised possibilities of a different order. If Tirpitz, exercising almost superhuman foresight and self-control, had made no submarine attack on commerce until at least two hundred U-boats were ready, and had not provoked us to counter-preparations in the meanwhile, no one can say what the result would have been. Happily the remedy increased with the danger. The U-boat menace was taking vast and terrible dimensions, but

The Winter
Situation
in Germany.

'The young disease which shall destroy at length
Grows with its growth and strengthens with its strength.'

Now however we are coming to the end of 1916, and in the breathing space which winter still affords to warring nations, the German Chiefs haggardly surveyed the deadly scene. In spite of the disasters which had followed Falkenhayn's decision to attack Verdun and to neglect the Eastern Fronts, Germany had survived. She had bled the French at Verdun; she had withstood the British upon the Somme; she had repaired the breach made by Brusiloff; she had even found strength to strike down Roumania, and had emerged from the year's welter with this trophy of victory. But the sense of frightful peril, of increasing pressure, of dwindling resources, of hard pressed fronts, of blockade-pinched populations, of red sand running out in the time-glass, lay heavily upon the leaders of Germany. In the West the Allies were preparing still more formidable blows for the spring; Russian resistance was unweakened; it was even reviving on a scale almost incredible. But for the first time two hundred U-boats were at hand. Would it be possible with these to starve Britain and so,

Two Hun-
dred U-
boats.

even if war with the United States resulted, 'break the backbone' of the Allies?

'Had we been able,' writes Tirpitz, 'to foresee in Germany the Russian revolution, we should perhaps not have needed to regard the submarine campaign of 1917 as a last resource. But in January, 1917, there was no visible sign of the revolution.'¹

During November and December the German Chancellor and the Military and Naval leaders racked the Emperor with their contentions:—Whether 200 U-boats in the hand were worth 120,000,000 Americans across the Atlantic: whether Britannia rules not only the waves but the waters underneath them too. Dire issue, exceeding in intensity the turning points in the struggles of Rome and Carthage!

There is no doubt that the responsibility for the decision rests upon Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Tirpitz was gone. He even argues that the moment for ruthless U-boat war had already passed, and records a somewhat hesitating comment of 'Too late.' But Main Headquarters had long been converted to the need of using the U-boat weapon at all costs to the full. In Ludendorff they had found a Chief who shrank from nothing, and upon whose mind supreme hazards exercised an evident fascination. The old Field-Marshal shared or adopted his resolve. He threw his whole weight against the Chancellor. The Admirals chimed in with promises of swift decisive success. The Civil Powers felt the balance turning against them. Their peace overtures had been unceremoniously rejected by the Allies. The stern interchange of telegrams between Hindenburg and Bethmann-Hollweg in the last week of the year marked the end of the Chancellor's resistance. On January 9² the decisive conference *à trois* was held at Pless. Ludendorff has published his notes in which the following passages occur:—

The Chancellor. When His Majesty orders the intensified submarine operations the Chancellor will endeavour to secure that America will still remain 'out.' Certain

¹ *My Memoirs*: Von Tirpitz, Vol. II, p. 442.

² The Translation of Ludendorff's: *The General Staff and its Problems*, gives Jan. 1 as the date of this conference. This is a translator's error.

concessions—which have been previously discussed with the Naval Staff—must be made. We must, however, reckon on the entry of America into the war. . . . The decision to embark on the unrestricted U-boat campaign is therefore dependent upon the results we expect from it. Admiral von Holtzendorf offers us the prospect that we shall have England at our mercy by the next harvest. The experiences of the U-boats in recent months, the increased number of boats, the bad economic situation of England, certainly form a reinforcement for luck. Taking it all round the prospects of the unrestricted submarine campaign are very favourable. Of course those favourable prospects are not capable of proof. We must be quite clear that, judging by the military situation, great military blows are scarcely likely to bring us final victory. The U-boat campaign is the ‘last card.’ A very serious decision! *But if the military authorities regard the U-boat campaign as necessary I am not in a position to oppose them.*¹

The Dire
Decision.

The Field-Marshal. We are in a position to meet all eventualities, against America, Denmark, Holland and even Switzerland.

The submarine operations in cruiser form have hitherto brought us only a slightly greater measure of success. We need the most energetic and ruthless action possible. Therefore the U-boat war must begin not later than February 1, 1917. The war must be brought to a speedy end on account of our Allies, though *we* could continue for some time longer.

The Chancellor. It is to be remembered that the U-boat war may mean postponing the end of the war.

General Ludendorff. The U-boat war will improve the situation even of our armies. The ammunition supply will suffer from the shortage of timber and coal. That means a relief for the troops on the Western Front. We must spare the troops a second Somme battle. Our own experience, the effect of the transport crisis, show that that relief is certain. Moreover, Russia's offensive capacity will be diminished by the shortage of ammunition due to the lack of tonnage. The Siberian Railway will not be enough for Russia by itself.

The Chancellor. On America's eventual entry into the war, her help will consist in the delivery of food to England, financial assistance, the supply of aeroplanes and a force of volunteers.

The Field-Marshal. We are already prepared to deal with that. The chances of the submarine operations are

¹ Ludendorff's italics.

'If Victory Beckons.'

more favourable than they are ever likely to be again. We can and must begin them.

The Chancellor. Yes, we must act if victory beckons.

The Field-Marshal. We shall be reproached later on if we let the moment slip.

The Chancellor. The position is certainly better than last September.

General Ludendorff. The measures we shall take against neutrals are in no way provocative. They are purely defensive.

The Chancellor. And suppose Switzerland came into the war or the French marched through that country.

The Field-Marshal. That would not be unfavourable, from the military point of view.¹

Of the meeting at which the Emperor was present later on the same day, the Chancellor has himself left an account.²

'Early in January (1917) I was summoned to G.H.Q. When I arrived in Pless on the morning of the 9th, the decision had *de facto* already been made. The Supreme Command and the Admiral Staff were determined on their part to have U-boat warfare. The Kaiser ranged himself on their side. Compared with the Spring and Summer of 1916, when I had prevented U-boat warfare, the situation had completely altered. Then my opinion had prevailed, because the authority of General von Falkenhayn, in view of the obviously insufficient number of U-boats, had not been great enough to impose a measure which, although it was popular in the circles influenced by the Conservatives, National Liberals and the Navy, was still regarded with scepticism by the majority of the Reichstag. . . .

'With all these considerations in my head, I went to the common audience with the Kaiser on the evening of the 9th January. There right away I found the general atmosphere just as laden as in a conference I had had alone with the Supreme Command at midday. I had the feeling that I had before me men who no longer had any inclination to be diverted by persuasion from their already settled decisions. Admiral Staff and O.H.L.³ put forward their demands. I

¹ *The General Staff and its Problems* : Ludendorff. Vol. I, p. 304.

² Bethmann-Hollweg : *Betrachtungen über den Weltkrieg*. Part ii, pp. 131-7.

³ The German G.H.Q. (Grosses Haupt-Quartier), Great Headquarters, was the Kaiser's Headquarters—political, naval and military. O.H.L. (Oberste Heeresleitung), the supreme command of the German Field Army, sometimes translated 'the Supreme Command' or 'the Main Headquarters,' was the military section of the German G.H.Q. Its head was the Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army.

declared that I could not throw doubt on the military opinion that the war could not be brought to a successful end by action on land alone. Certain success of the U-Boat war, in my opinion, could be just as little proved as certain failure. If success was denied then the worst of all ends stood before us. I must appreciate American help higher than the O.H.L. put it. After the reply of the Entente to our Peace offer I could not for the moment indicate any prospect of peace negotiations. In view of the condition of affairs and of the declaration of Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, made with the full weight of responsibility, that our military situation permitted us to take the risk of the certain imminent breach with America, I was not in a position to advise H.M. to oppose himself to the vote of his military counsellors. The decision was then made. In about half an hour the audience with the Kaiser, which was no longer a council, came to an end. *Next day O.H.L. advised the Kaiser to change his Chancellor at once.*¹

The Fate of
Russia.

His capitulation had availed him nothing. It would have been better before history to have gone down with flag flying. No one can doubt what his convictions were, and we now know that they were right. Events forthwith began their new course.

* * * * *

Surely to no nation has Fate been more malignant than to Russia. Her ship went down in sight of port. She had actually weathered the storm when all was cast away. Every sacrifice had been made; the toil was achieved. Despair and Treachery usurped command at the very moment when the task was done.

The long retreats were ended; the munition famine was broken; arms were pouring in; stronger, larger, better equipped armies guarded the immense front; the dépôts overflowed with sturdy men. Alexeieff directed the Army and Koltchak the Fleet. Moreover, no difficult action was now required: to remain in presence: to lean with heavy weight upon the far-stretched Teutonic line: to hold without exceptional activity the weakened hostile forces on her front: in a word, to endure—that was all that stood between Russia and the fruits of general victory. Says Ludendorff, surveying the scene at the close of 1916:

¹ My italics.—W. S. C.

Her Amazing
Recovery.

'Russia, in particular, produced very strong new formations, divisions were reduced to twelve battalions, the batteries to six guns; new divisions were formed out of the surplus fourth battalions and the seventh and eighth guns of each battery. This reorganization made a great increase of strength.'¹

It meant in fact that the Russian Empire marshalled for the campaign of 1917 a far larger and better equipped army than that with which she had started the war. In March the Czar was on his throne; the Russian Empire and people stood, the front was safe, and victory certain.

It is the shallow fashion of these times to dismiss the Czarist regime as a purblind, corrupt, incompetent tyranny. But a survey of its thirty months' war with Germany and Austria should correct these loose impressions and expose the dominant facts. We may measure the strength of the Russian Empire by the battering it had endured, by the disasters it had survived, by the inexhaustible forces it had developed, and by the recovery it had made. In the Governments of States, when great events are afoot, the leader of the nation, whoever he be, is held accountable for failure and vindicated by success. No matter who wrought the toil, who planned the struggle, to the supreme responsible authority belongs the blame or credit for the result.

Why should this stern test be denied to Nicholas II? He had made many mistakes, what ruler had not? He was neither a great captain nor a great prince. He was only a true, simple man of average ability, of merciful disposition, upheld in all his daily life by his faith in God. But the brunt of supreme decisions centred upon him. At the summit where all problems are reduced to Yea or Nay, where events transcend the faculties of men and where all is inscrutable, he had to give the answers. His was the function of the compass-needle. War or no war? Advance or retreat? Right or left? Democratize or hold firm? Quit or persevere? These were the battlefields of Nicholas II. Why should he reap no honour from them? The devoted onset of the Russian armies which saved Paris in 1914; the mastered agony of the munitionless retreat;

¹ Ludendorff, Vol. I, p. 305.

the slowly regathered forces ; the victories of Brusiloff ; the Russian entry upon the campaign of 1917, unconquered, stronger than ever ; has he no share in these ? In spite of errors vast and terrible, the régime he personified, over which he presided, to which his personal character gave the vital spark, had at this moment won the war for Russia.

Nicholas II.

Limitations
of the Ger-
man Mili-
tary Out-
look.

He is about to be struck down. A dark hand, gloved at first in folly, now intervenes. Exit Czar. Deliver him and all he loved to wounds and death. Belittle his efforts, asperse his conduct, insult his memory ; but pause then to tell us who else was found capable. Who or what could guide the Russian State ? Men gifted and daring ; men ambitious and fierce ; spirits audacious and commanding—of these there was no lack. But none could answer the few plain questions on which the life and fame of Russia turned. With victory in her grasp she fell upon the earth, devoured alive, like Herod of old, by worms. But not in vain her valiant deeds. The giant mortally stricken had just time, with dying strength, to pass the torch eastward across the ocean to a new Titan long sunk in doubt who now arose and began ponderously to arm. The Russian Empire fell on March 16 ; on April 6 the United States entered the war.

* * * * *

Of all the grand miscalculations of the German High Command none is more remarkable than their inability to comprehend the meaning of war with the American Union. It is perhaps the crowning example of the unwisdom of basing a war policy upon the computation of material factors alone. The war effort of 120,000,000 educated people, equipped with science, and possessed of the resources of an unattackable Continent, nay, of a New World, could not be measured by the number of drilled soldiers, of trained officers, of forged cannon, of ships of war they happened to have at their disposal. It betokens ignorance of the elemental forces resident in such a community to suppose they could be permanently frustrated by a mechanical instrument called the U-boat. How rash to balance the hostile exertions of the largest, if not the leading, civilized nation in the world against the chance that they

The Value
of American
Inter-
vention.

would not arrive in time upon the field of battle ! How hard to condemn the war-worn, wearied, already outnumbered heroic German people to mortal conflict with this fresh, mighty, and once aroused, implacable antagonist !

There is no need to exaggerate the material assistance given by the United States to the Allies. All that could be sent was given as fast and as freely as possible, whether in manhood, in ships or in money. But the war ended long before the material power of the United States could be brought to bear as a decisive or even as a principal factor. It ended with over 2,000,000 American soldiers on the soil of France. A campaign in 1919 would have seen very large American armies continually engaged, and these by 1920 might well have amounted to 5,000,000 of men. Compared to potentialities of this kind, what would have been the value of, let us say, the capture of Paris ? As for the 200 U-boats, the mechanical hope, there was still the British Navy, which at this period, under the ægis of an overwhelming battlefleet, maintained upwards of 3,000 armed vessels on the seas.

But if the physical power of the United States was not in fact applied in any serious degree to the beating down of Germany ; if for instance only a few score thousand Germans fell by American hands ; the moral consequence of the United States joining the Allies was indeed the deciding cause in the conflict.

The war had lasted nearly three years ; all the original combatants were at extreme tension ; on both sides the dangers of the front were matched by other dangers far behind the throbbing lines of contact. Russia has succumbed to these new dangers ; Austria is breaking up ; Turkey and Bulgaria are wearing thin ; Germany herself is forced even in full battle to concede far-reaching Constitutional rights and franchise to her people ; France is desperate ; Italy is about to pass within an ace of destruction ; and even in stolid Britain there is a different light in the eyes of men. Suddenly a nation of one hundred and twenty millions unfurls her standard on what is already the stronger side ; suddenly the most numerous democracy in the world, long posing as a judge, is hurled, nay, hurls

itself into the conflict. The loss of Russia was forgotten in this new reinforcement. Defeatist movements were strangled on the one side and on the other inflamed. Far and wide through every warring nation spread these two opposite impressions—‘ The whole world is against us ’ —‘ The whole world is on our side.’

The American Stand-point.

American historians will perhaps be somewhat lengthy in explaining to posterity exactly why the United States entered the Great War on April 6, 1917, and why they did not enter at any earlier moment. American ships had been sunk before by German submarines ; as many American lives were lost in the *Lusitania* as in all the five American ships whose sinking immediately preceded the declaration of war. As for the general cause of the Allies, if it was good in 1917 was it not equally good in 1914 ? There were plenty of reasons of high policy for staying out in 1917 after waiting so long.

It was natural that the Allies, burning with indignation against Germany, breathless and bleeding in the struggle, face to face with mortal dangers, should stand amazed at the cool, critical, detached attitude of the great Power across the Atlantic. In England particularly, where laws and language seemed to make a bridge of mutual comprehension between the two nations, the American abstention was hard to understand. But this was to do less than justice to important factors in the case. The United States did not feel in any immediate danger. Time and distance interposed their minimizing perspectives. The mass of the people engaged in peaceful industry, grappling with the undeveloped resources of the continent which was their inheritance, absorbed in domestic life and politics, taught by long constitutional tradition to shun foreign entanglements, had an entirely different field of mental interest from that of Europe. World Justice makes its appeal to all men. But what share, it was asked, had Americans taken in bringing about the situation which had raised the issue of World Justice ? Was even this issue so simple as it appeared to the Allies ? Was it not a frightful responsibility to launch a vast, unarmed, remote community into the raging centre of such a quarrel ? That all this was overcome is

The Rigid
Constitution.

the real wonder. All honour to those who never doubted, and who from the first discerned the inevitable path.

The rigid Constitution of the United States, the gigantic scale and strength of its party machinery, the fixed terms for which public officers and representatives are chosen, invest the President with a greater measure of autocratic power than was possessed before the war by the Head of any great State. The vast size of the country, the diverse types, interests and environments of its enormous population, the safety-valve function of the legislatures of fifty Sovereign States, make the focussing of national public opinion difficult, and confer upon the Federal Government exceptional independence of it except at fixed election times. Few modern Governments need to concern themselves so little with the opinion of the party they have beaten at the polls; none secures to its supreme executive officer, at once the Sovereign and the Party Leader, such direct personal authority.

The accident of hereditary succession which brings a King or Emperor to the throne occurs on the average at intervals of a quarter of a century. During this long period, as well as in his whole life before accession, the qualities and disposition of the monarch can be studied by his subjects, and during this period parties and classes are often able to devise and create checks and counter-checks upon personal action. In limited monarchies where the responsibilities of power are borne by the Prime Minister, the choice of the nation usually falls upon Statesmen who have lived their lives in the public eye, who are moreover members of the Legislature and continuously accountable to it for their tenure. But the magnitude and the character of the electoral processes of the United States make it increasingly difficult, if not indeed already impossible, for any life-long politician to become a successful candidate for the Presidency. The choice of the party managers tends more and more to fall upon eminent citizens of high personal character and civic virtue who have not mingled profoundly in politics or administration, and who in consequence are free from the animosities and the errors which such combative and anxious experiences involve. More

often than not the champion selected for the enthusiasms and ideals of tens of millions is unversed in State affairs, and raised suddenly to dazzling pre-eminence on the spur of the moment. The war-stained veterans of the party battle select, after many fierce internal convulsions, a blameless and honourable figure to bear aloft the party standard. They manufacture his programme and his policy, and if successful in the battle install him for four years at the summit of the State, clothed thenceforward with direct executive functions which in practical importance are not surpassed on the globe.

President
Wilson.

Like all brief generalizations upon great matters, the foregoing paragraph is subject to numerous and noteworthy exceptions. But President Wilson was not one of them. In all his strength and in all his weakness, in his nobility and in his foibles, he was, in spite of his long academic record and brief governorship, an unknown, an unmeasured quantity to the mighty people who made him their ruler in 1912. Still more was he a mystery to the world at large. Writing with every sense of respect, it seems no exaggeration to pronounce that the action of the United States with its repercussions on the history of the world depended, during the awful period of Armageddon, upon the workings of this man's mind and spirit to the exclusion of almost every other factor; and that he played a part in the fate of nations incomparably more direct and personal than any other man.

It is in this light that the Memoirs of Colonel House acquire their peculiar interest. In these pages we see a revelation of the President. Dwelling in the bosom of his domestic circle with the simplicity and frugality of Nicholas II, inaccessible except to friends and servitors—and very sparingly to them—towering above Congress, the Cabinet his mere implement, untempered and undinted in the smithy of public life, and guided by that 'frequent recurrence to first principles' enjoined in the American Constitution, Woodrow Wilson, the inscrutable and undecided judge upon whose lips the lives of millions hung, stands forth a monument for human meditation.

First and foremost, all through and last, he was a Party

His
Problems.

man. His dominating loyalty was to the great political association which had raised him to the Presidency, and on whose continued prosperity he was sincerely convinced the best interests of mankind depended. We see him in the height of the American war effort, when all that the Union could give without distinction of class or party was lavished upon the Government of the day, using his natural position without scruple or apparent self-examination to procure the return to Congress of only those representatives whose names were on the Democratic ticket. Under his régime there were none of those temporary sacrifices of party rancour which were forced on European countries by their perils. The whole power and prestige of the American nation at war was politically impounded so far as possible by the office holders of the day and the party machine. This bred a hatred among political opponents whose sons were fighting, whose money was poured out, whose patriotism was ardent, which as soon as the fighting stopped, proved fatal to President Wilson and his hopes. Next he was a good American, an academic Liberal, and a sincere hater of war and violence. Upon these easily harmonized impulses there had fallen in intense interplay such of the stresses of the European war as rolled across the Atlantic, and all the internal pressures of American policy. He was confronted with four separate successive questions which searched his nature to its depths. How to keep the United States out of the war? How to win the Presidential election of 1916? How to help the Allies to win the war? and lastly, How to rule the world at its close?

He would have been greatly helped in his task if he had reached a definite conclusion where in the European struggle Right lay. Events like the German march through Belgium, or the sinking of the *Lusitania*, had a meaning which was apparent to friend and foe. They both proclaimed the intention to use force without any limit of forbearance to an absolute conclusion. Such a prospect directly affected the interests and indeed the safety of the United States. The victory of Germany and the concomitant disappearance of France and the British Empire as great

Powers must, after an uncertain interval, have left the peaceful and unarmed population of the United States nakedly exposed to the triumph of the doctrine of Force without limit. The Teutonic Empires in the years following their victory would have been far stronger by land and sea than the United States. They could easily have placed themselves in a more favourable relationship to Japan than was open to the United States. In such a situation their views upon the destinies of South America could not have been effectively resisted. Immense developments of armed force would in any case have been required in the United States, and sooner or later a new conflict must have arisen in which the United States would have found herself alone.

His Efforts
to abstain
from War.

President Wilson did not however during the first two and a half years of the war allow his mind to dwell upon the German use of force without restraint, and still less upon the ultimate consequences of its success. He did not therefore feel that American interests were involved from the outset in the European struggle. He distrusted and repressed those sentiments of indignation which the scenes in Belgium or the sinking of the *Lusitania* aroused in his breast. He did not truly divine the instinct of the American people. He underestimated the volume and undervalued the quality of the American feeling in favour of the Allies. Not until he was actually delivering his famous war message to Congress did he understand where, in the vast medley of American opinion, the dominant will-power of the nation lay and had always lain. Not until then did he move forward with confidence and conviction; not until then did he restate the cause of the Allies in terms unsurpassed by any of their own statesmen; not until then did he reveal to the American people where in his judgment world-right was founded, and how their own lives and material interests were at stake.

The desperate action of the German War-Leaders left him in the end no loophole of escape. On January 31, Germany informed the United States of her intention to begin the unrestricted submarine campaign. On February 3, the German Ambassador at Washington was given his passports,

Increasing
Provocation.

the United States representative at Berlin was recalled, and the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany was announced by the President to Congress. But Mr. Wilson had still another line of defence. He declined to believe that any 'overt act' would follow the declaration of the German intention. On February 26 the virtual arrest of United States shipping through fear of German attack forced him to ask Congressional authority to arm American merchant ships. On February 26, an American ship was sunk and eight Americans drowned. Meanwhile the British Intelligence Service had ascertained that Herr Zimmermann, the German Foreign Secretary, had instructed the German Minister in Mexico to make an alliance with Mexico in the event of war between Germany and the United States, and to offer as an inducement to the Mexicans the United States territories of Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. This document, which dealt also with the possibilities of ranging Japan against the United States, was published by the American Government on March 1. During March four American vessels were sunk with the loss of twelve American lives. On April 1, the *Aztec* was sunk and twenty-eight Americans drowned. On the 2nd, President Wilson demanded from Congress a declaration that a state of war existed between the United States and Germany.

Step by step the President had been pursued and brought to bay. By slow merciless degrees, against his dearest hopes, against his gravest doubts, against his deepest inclinations, in stultification of all he had said and done and left undone in thirty months of carnage, he was forced to give the signal he dreaded and abhorred. Throughout he had been beneath the true dominant note of American sentiment. He had behind his policy a reasoned explanation and massive argument, and all must respect the motives of a statesman who seeks to spare his country the waste and horrors of war. But nothing can reconcile what he said after March, 1917, with the guidance he had given before. What he did in April, 1917, could have been done in May, 1915. And if done then what abridgment of the slaughter; what sparing of the agony; what ruin,

what catastrophes would have been prevented; in how many million homes would an empty chair be occupied to-day; how different would be the shattered world in which victors and vanquished alike are condemned to live!

The Final
Rupture.

But anyhow all was settled now. 'A drunken brawl,' 'Peace without victory,' where were these festering phrases on April 2? Amid the clink and clatter of a cavalry escort the President has reached the Senate. He is reading his message to Congress and to mankind. Out roll the famous periods in which the righteousness of the Allied cause was finally proclaimed.

'Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. Even hospital ships and ships carrying relief to the sorely bereaved and stricken people of Belgium, though the latter were provided with safe-conduct through the proscribed areas by the German Government itself, and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle. . . . The peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. . . . The world must be made safe for Democracy. . . . The right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts—for Democracy, for the rights of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free people as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.'

In response to all of this the House of Representatives on April 6 resolved that a state of war was formally declared, and that 'to bring the conflict to a successful termination all the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States.'

From the Atlantic to the Pacific the call was answered and obeyed. Iron laws of compulsory service, reinforced

America at
War.

by social pressures of mutual discipline in which the great majority of the population took part, asserted an instantaneous unity of opinion. No one stood against the torrent. Pacifism, indifference, dissent, were swept from the path and fiercely pursued to extermination ; and with a roar of slowly gathered, pent-up wrath which overpowered in its din every discordant yell, the American nation sprang to arms.

CHAPTER X

A POLITICAL INTERLUDE

The Coalition Government in 1915—The Conscription Issue—The War Policy Committee's Report—Mr. Asquith and Lord Kitchener—Temporizing in Peace and War—The Conscription Crises of January and April, 1916—Lord Northcliffe and the Press—The Balance destroyed—Politicians v. Generals—Lord Northcliffe's undue power—Mr. Asquith's imprudent disdain—The rejected remedy—Discontent of the Conservative Party—Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson—A crucial Division—The potential Triumvirate—Lloyd George challenges Asquith—Lloyd George Prime Minister—My Exclusion—The Secret Session—My Survey of the War—Deepening Peril—Lloyd George undaunted—His qualities, energy and resolution.

IT is now necessary to return to those domains of British politics which we quitted after the formation of the Coalition Government at the end of May, 1915. It was then observed that the new Cabinet, although composed of a large number of eminent and upright men, was a cumbrous and unsatisfactory instrument for the waging of a great war. From the outset certain remarkable cleavages and personal currents were apparent. These cleavages and currents did not follow regular Party lines, but responded rather to the shades of temperament and opinion found in every Party. There was the old Liberal school gathered round the Prime Minister, which was reluctant to proceed to drastic domestic measures for the conduct of the war. They were not without their affinities among the Conservatives. This school was deeply impressed with the financial difficulties arising out of the enormous payments we were forced to make to the United States to equip ourselves and our Allies on the greatest scale. They were averse from proceeding to extremes in the industrial sphere in order to procure the greatest output of munitions. Above all, they were opposed to the principle of compulsory

The Coalition Government in 1915.

The Con-
scription
Issue.

service to maintain the armies in the field. It was upon this issue that the main division of opinion and feeling crystallized.

Of course, the counsel of perfection at the outbreak of a life-and-death struggle would have been for Parliament to decree Universal service. In this way the terrible burdens of war could have been justly apportioned throughout the whole nation, and the needs of the fighting services whether in men or material scientifically regulated from month to month. It would not have been necessary to keep hundreds of thousands of volunteers training with the Colours long before there was a rifle to put in their hands, for fear that at a later date their offer to serve might no longer be forthcoming. But these logical and symmetrical conceptions were not in harmony with the British habit of mind. The psychological moment of the first awful plunge into war was allowed to pass, and in a few weeks we reached a period in which compulsory military service was obviously unnecessary. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers overwhelmed the recruiting offices to fill the army and such military organizations as could be improvised beyond it. Before the first three months of the war were over, it was clear that whatever else Britain might lack, it was not citizens ready to fight in her defence. Indeed, the danger was lest too many should quit the vital industries of the nation for the firing line.

This condition continued until the middle of 1915, but in June and July of that year another phase supervened. The failure of Russia made it certain that the war would last for years. The delivery of rifles, equipment and munitions, and the advance in the training of the Kitchener armies, made possible a large and rapid increase of the British forces actually in the field. The wastage of men grew larger every day. Thirty-five British divisions were already serving on the various fronts, and as many more were steadily approaching readiness at home. Sending a division to the front was like lighting a new lamp which burned away its oil at a remorseless rate; it was like opening a new tap in a cistern. Soon there would be at least seventy such taps drawing unceas-

ingly upon the accumulated store of voluntary effort. Over 3,000,000 men had already come forward freely. They represented all that was best and strongest in the patriotism of the British nation. By the summer of 1915 the outflow was already greater than the intake. The Cabinet Committee on War Policy which sat during June and July saw plainly that armies of seventy divisions, still less of one hundred divisions, could not be maintained in the field during 1916 without entirely new measures. The strict Liberal school, headed by the Prime Minister, favoured a further effort at voluntary recruiting. Most of the Conservative Ministers, supported by Mr. Lloyd George and myself, were convinced that immediate compulsion was unavoidable. It was in this sense that I drew up a report to the Cabinet in July, 1915, which was signed by Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Curzon, Lord Selborne and others. This report had concluded as follows :

The War
Policy Com-
mittee's
Report.

‘ We cannot afford, as in Germany or France, to sweep into the army the great mass of the military manhood of the country. Neither can we afford to take men indiscriminately for military service as they present themselves, without regard to their individual services or their usefulness in other spheres. With us the problem is more complex ; the quality of the effort must be higher and more varied ; the need for control and organization even more vital. Of all the belligerent nations we are the one which can least afford to take a married man of 40 while a bachelor of 25 is idle. It is not wise to take a skilled munition worker for the front while a private domestic remains at home. We ought not to let one district be depleted through its patriotism of the indispensable minimum of agricultural or unskilled labour, while in another the recruiters have made practically no headway. We cannot close whole industries to recruiting even the most suitable men, while in others we sweep every man, even up to the oldest father of a family, into the line of battle. We cannot afford to fill our marching battalions with an undue proportion of men past their prime. We cannot afford to let a military male needed for the army do work which could be done by a woman, a boy, or an older man. Greater efforts in national organization are required to remedy these defects, and thus ensure in all its various forms the maximum development of war energy among our people.’

Mr. Asquith
and Lord
Kitchener.

Lord Kitchener, however, did not support these views. He was rightly proud of the wonderful response which had attended his successive appeals for volunteers. He indulged himself in the belief that his countrymen would give him personally whatever numbers he thought right to demand. He therefore leaned to the side of Mr. Asquith, and turned the balance against the adoption of compulsory service at this time. In September, after the losses of Loos had shown what the strain of 1916 would be, the tension between the two groups in the Cabinet became very acute. So grave indeed did it become that a thorough discussion in full Cabinet would have broken up the Government. Therefore, as sometimes happens, the topic which filled all minds became unmentionable in Council, and many weeks slipped away in deadlock. At last in the middle of October a gathering of nine Ministers, including Mr. Lloyd George and myself, met at Lord Curzon's house and resolved at all costs to bring the question to a head. Confronted with the crisis, the daily aggravation of which was apparent, Lord Kitchener and the Prime Minister together produced a new and far-reaching scheme for what was avowedly the final effort of voluntary enlistment. Lord Derby was brought forward to head this movement, and the scheme was presented to the Cabinet as a decision already taken. By this means the Cabinet crisis, with the long series of resignations threatened on both sides, was for the time being staved off.

There is an extraordinary contrast between the processes of thought and methods of management required in War and those which serve in Peace. Much is gained in Peace by ignoring or putting off disagreeable or awkward questions, and avoiding clear-cut decisions which if they please some, offend others. It is often better in Peace to persist for a time patiently in an obscure and indeterminate course of action rather than break up or dangerously strain a political combination. Under a popular and democratic form of government, where enormous numbers of people have a right to be consulted, and all sorts of personalities, forces and interests have their legitimate interplay upon the course of public affairs, compromise is very often not merely

necessary but actually beneficial. The object in time of Peace is often to keep the Nation undisturbed by violent passions, and able to move forward in a steady progress through the free working of its native energies and virtues. Many an apparently insoluble political problem solves itself or sinks to an altogether lower range if time, patience and phlegm are used. British politicians and Parliamentarians, particularly those called upon to lead great parties, are masters in all these arts, and if after four or five years of power they have succeeded, without provoking crises in the State or divisions among their supporters, in achieving large national objects and enabling public opinion to carry in its own way and its own time important social or political reforms, they justly deserve their place in history.

Temporizing
in Peace
and War.

In War everything is different. There is no place for compromise in War. That invaluable process only means that soldiers are shot because their leaders in Council and camp are unable to resolve. In War the clouds never blow over, they gather unceasingly and fall in thunderbolts. Things do not get better by being let alone. Unless they are adjusted, they explode with shattering detonation. Clear leadership, violent action, rigid decisions one way or the other, form the only path not only of victory, but of safety and even of mercy. The State cannot afford division or hesitation at the executive centre. To humour a distinguished man, to avoid a fierce dispute, nay, even to preserve the governing instrument itself, cannot, except as an alternative to sheer anarchy, be held to justify half-measures. The peace of the Council may for the moment be won, but the price is paid on the battlefield by brave men marching forward against unspeakable terrors in the belief that conviction and coherence have animated their orders.

* * * * *

It was evident that the Derby scheme could only be a palliative. Although the response was considerable, the maintenance of the armies even on a seventy-division basis through 1916, and 1917 which must also be contemplated, was in no way provided for. Early in January, under the imperious force of events, the Cabinet

The Con-
scription
Crises of
January
and April,
1916.

crisis renewed itself with violent intensity. And now the grim necessity of facts was reinforced by a movement of a moral character exciting the passions of enormous masses of people. Three and a half million men had volunteered. They were not enough. Were they in virtue of their voluntary engagement to be sent back to the front no matter how often they were wounded? Were elderly, weakly, shattered volunteers to be pressed into the conflict while hundreds of thousands of sturdy youths lived as far as possible their ordinary life? Were the citizens of the Territorial Force or soldiers of the Regular Army whose engagements had expired to be compelled to continue, while others who had made no sacrifice were not even to be compelled to begin? From three and a half million families whose beloved breadwinner, whose hero, was giving all freely to the country's cause—families representing the strongest elements on which the life of the nation depended—arose the demand that victory should not be delayed and slaughter prolonged because others refused to do their duty. At last, at the end of January, Lord Kitchener changed sides and Mr. Asquith gave way. In the end only one Minister, Sir John Simon, resigned from the administration. A Conscription Bill was presented to Parliament and swiftly passed by overwhelming majorities.

The new Act was however, as might be expected from the internal struggle which had produced it, an unsatisfying compromise. It neither secured the numbers of men that would be needed, nor did it meet the now fierce demand for equalization of sacrifice. In April a new crisis upon the extension of compulsion developed in the Cabinet. The previous struggle had left its marks on both sides, and differences of temperament of a profound character had been revealed between colleagues to all of whom the national cause was equally dear. This time it seemed certain that Mr. Lloyd George would resign and the Cabinet be broken up, and plans were elaborated to form a strong Opposition pledged to the enforcement of extreme war measures.

It was suggested that the Leaders of such an opposition in the House of Commons should be Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Edward Carson, and I was urged from many quarters

to take my place at their side. The Scottish battalion I had been commanding for some months in Flanders having been disbanded through the lack of men, I was accorded leave to return to the Parliamentary sphere. In May, Parliament appointed by Statute two Committees of Inquiry into the operations in Mesopotamia and at the Dardanelles, and I found myself immediately involved for nearly a year in a continued and harassing defence of my own responsibilities as set forth in the second volume of this account. It is from the standpoint of a private member not without information upon secret matters that I record the events of the next twelve months.

Lord North-
cliffe and
the Press.

* * * * *

The career of the British newspaper Press in the Great War is a definite part of history. No account which excluded its influence would be true. The fortunes of the Press were also a romance centring round the extraordinary personality of Lord Northcliffe, and no story could present more vivid contrasts of strength and weakness. Never was Press control in any country so effective as in Great Britain during the first six months of the war. To a rigorous Government censorship was added an even more effective internal restraint exerted by the public spirit of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association. Criticism was mute, and facts were selected and presented only in a spirit of confidence and hope.

The first idea of the military authorities was that the Press had ceased to exist with the declaration of war. Not a single Correspondent was permitted with the Fleet or in the zone of the Armies, and the anxious public was expected to be satisfied with the cryptic and jejune communiqués accorded them from time to time by General Headquarters. These conventions were soon shaken by defeat. The zone of the Armies became ragged at the edges. Facts and stragglers streamed backwards preceded and attended by clouds of rumour. Wounded arrived by the thousand from the front. The demand for knowledge of the events which were in progress became insistent. In view of Lord Kitchener's well-known dislike of newspaper Correspondents, I had suggested to him in September, 1914, the institution

The Balance
destroyed.

of an official 'eye-witness' at General Headquarters. The eye-witness¹ plied his skilful pen; but it might have been Mrs. Partington's broom against the flood of truth and rumour which rolled continuously back across the Channel. In the beginning of 1915 a few selected Correspondents were as a great concession allowed with the Army. Meanwhile the nature of the struggle and the inevitable mistakes, misfortunes and losses which scarred its path, affected the position of every leading and responsible actor—military, naval or political. The credit of Governments and Staffs, of Admiralty, War Office and Headquarters, tottered under the rude violence of the Teutonic attack. Ministers and Commanders, and not less those who aspired to fill their places, became conscious of an enormous latent power capable alike of enforcing action, of deflecting policy, of explaining disaster and of proclaiming success. And behind all lay the nation through whose united strength the war could alone be waged, ready to give all, but demanding knowledge and guidance. Thus after a brief but total eclipse, the sun of newspaper power began in the spring of 1915 to glow with unprecedented and ever-increasing heat.

In the old Party days when the whole British Press was regimented on one side or the other, its function was healthy and its power modest. Each great Party had its organs, not only in the Metropolis but in every city and town throughout the land. Liberal or Conservative politicians stood on firm ground. To be praised by Press supporters was almost as useful as to be abused by Press opponents. For every act of Government there were a thousand journalistic critics and another thousand champions. But critics and champions alike preached mainly to the converted, and gave to faithful Party followers the music they wished to hear. Blare and counter-blare cancelled each other, and policy could pursue its path with composure.

The national unity which sprang from the war destroyed this equilibrium. All were on one side and the enemy on the other. The whole force of the Press could be thrown

¹ Lieut.-Col. now Maj.-Gen. Sir Ernest Swinton.

against any Government, Minister or policy smitten by fortune. Errors, failures, shortcomings, inevitable when puny men were confronted with the giant torrent of events, found no defenders. The governing instrument was loaded at once with the extremes of support and opposition ; and although almost unswerving loyalty to the national cause and universal desire to escape from mortal peril compelled a general restraint, the position of every leading figure became precarious in the highest degree.

Moreover, the truth could not be told ; the case could not be argued. The Press, though its information flowed in through a thousand rills, possessed only a partial knowledge of the facts and operative causes as these were known to the Governments ; and these Governments themselves only imperfectly apprehended the stupendous problem which they were attempting to solve. Half our mistakes and many of our misfortunes could have been avoided if the great issues of war policy and strategy could have been fought out across the floor of the House of Commons in the full light of day. But this was impossible while the Enemy was the auditor of every discussion and the student of every published report or article. Debate followed by Division, that last security of every Minister or Government, was precluded. Arguments were used which could not be refuted, though refutation was easy. Charges were made of which the disproof could not in the national interest be adduced ; and the physical carnage of the trenches was accompanied by an odious confusion at home.

A series of absurd conventions became established, perhaps inevitably, in the public mind. The first and most monstrous of these was that the Generals and Admirals were more competent to deal with the broad issues of the war than abler men in other spheres of life. The General no doubt was an expert on how to move his troops, and the Admiral upon how to fight his ships, though even in this restricted field the limitations of their scientific knowledge when confronted with unforeseen conditions and undreamed-of scales became immediately apparent. But outside this technical aspect they were helpless and misleading arbiters in problems in whose solution the aid of the Statesman, the financier, the

Politicians
v. Generals.

Lord North-
cliffe's un-
due Power.

manufacturer, the inventor, the psychologist, was equally required. The foolish doctrine was preached to the public through innumerable agencies that Generals and Admirals must be right on war matters, and civilians of all kinds must be wrong. These erroneous conceptions were inculcated billion-fold by the newspapers under the crudest forms. The feeble or presumptuous politician is portrayed cowering in his office, intent in the crash of the world on Party intrigues or personal glorification, fearful of responsibility, incapable of aught save shallow phrase-making. To him enters the calm, noble, resolute figure of the great Commander by land or sea, resplendent in uniform, glittering with decorations, irradiated with the lustre of the hero, shod with the science and armed with the panoply of war. This stately figure, devoid of the slightest thought of self, offers his clear far-sighted guidance and counsel for vehement action or artifice or wise delay. But his advice is rejected ; his sound plans put aside ; his courageous initiative baffled by political chatterboxes and incompetents. As well, it was suggested, might a great surgeon, about to operate with sure science and the study of a lifetime upon a desperate case, have his arm jogged or his hand impeded, or even his lancet snatched from him, by some agitated relation of the patient. Such was the picture presented to the public, and such was the mood which ruled. It was not however entirely in accordance with the facts ; and facts, especially in war, are stubborn things.

Although, as has been described, the Press played only a contributory part in the overturn of Mr. Asquith's Liberal Administration, its power was sensibly increased by the formation of the first Coalition Government. The British Commander-in-Chief had not scrupled to inform Lord Northcliffe of the shell shortage. Lord Northcliffe had not hesitated to publish the facts and to attack, not only the Prime Minister, but Lord Kitchener himself. The furious onslaughts of the Northcliffe Press had been accompanied by the collapse of the Administration. To the minds of the public the two events presented themselves broadly as cause and effect. Henceforward Lord Northcliffe felt himself to be possessed of formidable power. Armed with the solemn

prestige of *The Times* in one hand and the ubiquity of the *Daily Mail* in the other, he aspired to exercise a commanding influence upon events. The inherent instability and obvious infirmity of the first Coalition Government offered favourable conditions for the advancement of these claims. The recurring crises on the subject of conscription presented numerous occasions for their assertion. He was in intimate relation with some of the most powerful Ministers. General Headquarters, both under Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig, treated him with deference. A spacious chateau—monument of their triumph—accommodated the once-banned War Correspondents, and the group of brilliant writers who represented the British Press were recognized and accepted as an indispensable part of the military machine.

Mr. Asquith's imprudent Disdain.

There can be no doubt that Lord Northcliffe was at all times animated by an ardent patriotism and an intense desire to win the war. But he wielded power without official responsibility, enjoyed secret knowledge without the general view, and disturbed the fortunes of national leaders without being willing to bear their burdens. Thus a swaying force, uncertain, capricious, essentially personal, potent alike for good and evil, claiming to make or mar public men, to sustain or displace Commanders, to shape policies, and to fashion or overthrow Governments, introduced itself in the absence of all Parliamentary correctives into the conduct of the war.

No public man was more unaffectedly and consistently disdainful of this new development than Mr. Asquith. Relying on his control of the Liberal Party machine, he believed himself as independent of the Northcliffe Press during the war as Liberal Prime Ministers and Governments had been throughout the political struggles which preceded it. He disliked Lord Northcliffe, despised his activities, and ignored his influence. However majestic this attitude may have been, it did not take sufficient account of the realities of the time. The Liberal forces on which the Prime Minister was wont to rely had been gravely dissipated by the war. Parliament, the necessary counterpoise of the Press, was largely in abeyance. The Platform was

The rejected
Remedy.

occupied solely by propaganda and recruiting. Public opinion was thus deprived of two out of the three great educative influences on which it depends in normal times. A policy of tireless detraction of certain Ministers and the ceaseless favouring of others, pursued month after month amid the convulsive episodes of war and the zealous passions of the agonized nation, was bound eventually to produce results in action.

In these circumstances a Dictator would have offered Lord Northcliffe the alternative of high and responsible office or honourable captivity until the conclusion of hostilities. Mr. Asquith was no Dictator, but even as a Constitutional Prime Minister he possessed two great and decisive means of self-defence. The first, suggested by Lord Rosebery, was the compulsory conversion of *The Times* by the Government into an official Monitor till the end of the war; the second was the Secret Session of the House of Commons. Both these measures would greatly have strengthened the hands of the Administration. The former would have afforded them a sure and authoritative means of guiding public opinion; the second would have bound them to the House of Commons in a comprehending and sympathetic unity. On agreeing to take office in the first Coalition I pressed both these courses upon Mr. Asquith. He did not however adopt either. He took no steps to acquire *The Times*, and only once in his tenure did he resort most reluctantly and half-heartedly to the process of Secret Session. There remained therefore, as the reply to remorseless depreciation, only victory in the field. Victory would have carried all before it, but victory was unprocurable.

To the patriotic vagaries of Lord Northcliffe were added the Party vendettas of the *Morning Post*. This famous newspaper, though at that time possessing only a limited circulation, has played an appreciable part in the history of the last ten years. Written with extreme brilliancy, sincerely and consistently animated by Party spirit, this organ of the extreme Right persevered in its campaign of detraction, which never rested till it had contributed to driving successively from office every public man, Liberal or

Conservative, not associated with its particular school of opinion.

Discontent
of the Con-
servative
Party.

* * * * *

The conscription crisis of April, 1916, was however averted by further concessions on the part of Mr. Asquith. A new National Service Bill was passed, and Mr. Lloyd George remained in the Government.

During the summer and autumn the Coalition Government had hung uneasily together, racked by many stresses and strains. In these circumstances Mr. Bonar Law, the Leader of the Conservative Party, held the key position and was himself exposed to peculiar difficulties. Opposite to him in the House of Commons sat Sir Edward Carson, with a deeper personal hold in some respects upon the Conservative Party than its titular leader. As the pressure of the war grew, the discontent of the Conservatives with its conduct under a Liberal Prime Minister became steadily more serious, and all this dissatisfaction was focused and directed on the Government by Sir Edward Carson, who though himself at that time devoid of any administrative record seemed to typify the most vehement and uncompromising war policy in every sphere. Mr. Bonar Law, like Mr. Asquith, was essentially a party man. After joining the coalition he had declared that he would not continue to hold office in the Government if at any time a majority of the Conservative members of the House of Commons voted against it: he would not, that is to say, retain his position in virtue of Liberal votes. Thus the growth of support behind Sir Edward Carson clearly indicated an approaching change. On November 8, Sir Edward Carson raised a debate on the seemingly trivial and irrelevant issue of the sale conditions of some small enemy properties in Nigeria. A resolution was moved declaring that 'such properties and businesses should be sold only to natural-born British subjects or companies wholly British.' The debate, which dealt chiefly with Nigerian Palm Kernels, was marked by the utmost acerbity. A large number of the most influential members of the Conservative party including particularly the Protectionists evinced a marked hostility to the Government. Mr. Bonar Law, as Colonial Secretary, was the

Mr. Bonar
Law and
Sir Edward
Carson.
A Crucial
Division.

Minister directly concerned, and not even his position as a party leader saved him from marked expressions of displeasure renewed in speech after speech with a curious persistency. Stung by this attack from his own friends and supporters, Mr. Bonar Law declared bluntly that the matter was one of direct confidence in the Government, and that Sir Edward Carson no doubt realized the seriousness of the course he was taking. Notwithstanding this the dispute was pressed to a division in which only 73 Conservative Members voted for the Government out of a total of 286, while 65 flatly rejected the appeal of Mr. Bonar Law. This debate and division revealed a depth of hostility to Mr. Asquith's Administration in the Conservative ranks which could not be restrained by the presence of the Conservative leaders in the Cabinet. It was in consequence a danger-signal of the plainest kind. But a complication had arisen. The consistent support which Mr. Bonar Law gave to the Prime Minister had brought him into differences on various occasions with Mr. Lloyd George, the most prominent member of the drastic war-policy group. These differences were exacerbated by the debate and division on Nigerian Palm Kernels. It happened that on that night Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Edward Carson were dining together, and by an accident Mr. Lloyd George was not in the House to support the Colonial Secretary when the division was taken. Thus the two principal personages whose common action was necessary to any decisive change in the Administration were for the time out of touch with each other.

The general misfortune in which the year 1916 closed produced feelings of disappointment and vexation in the Cabinet which overcame this personal misunderstanding. The failure to break the German line in the Somme battle in spite of the enormous losses incurred, the marvellous recovery of the Germanic powers in the East, the ruin of Roumania brought as it seemed so incontinently into the war, and the first beginnings of a renewed submarine warfare, strengthened and stimulated all those forces which insisted upon the need of still greater vigour in the conduct of affairs. Mr. Bonar Law became increasingly convinced as the rifts in the Cabinet deepened that Mr. Lloyd George's

resignation would destroy the prospects of a successful conduct of the war. Forced to choose between Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Asquith, he had no doubts where his duty lay. Through the offices of Sir Max Aitken,¹ Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Lloyd George came together in the closing days of November in a decision to secure a new and more effective instrument of war direction. The main principle uniting the two Ministers was that the existing Cabinet system whereby the executive heads of the various Departments, each with his special point of view, formed the supreme directing authority, was not adapted to the unprecedented peril of the times. In this view they were of course in full accord with Sir Edward Carson, and thus formed a potential Triumvirate.

The Potential Triumvirate.

But while these general bases of agreement were laid between the two Ministers, no specific method or occasion of bringing the issue to a head presented itself. There was general ferment and unrest in both the schools of policy into which the Government was divided, and an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability betokened the approaching storm. Early in December, Mr. Lloyd George, then Secretary of State for War, formally raised the question of the withdrawal of the Prime Minister from the Presidency of the War Committee. He suggested that the political control of the Government and the task of directing the war could not be combined in the hands of a single man, however able or commanding. He proposed that the War Committee should be strengthened by the constant attendance of the Chiefs of the fighting services, that its presidency should be confided to another Minister whose name was not mentioned, but who could in the circumstances clearly be no other than himself; and that the Prime Minister should exercise a general supervision over affairs and retain the supreme political control.

This arrangement was at first not unfavourably entertained by Mr. Asquith. Indeed, if it is studied with attention, it will appear to have contained many features of great advantage to him. Viewing the issue from a detached standpoint, I reached the conclusion, as did Sir Edward

¹ Now Lord Beaverbrook.

Lloyd
George
challenges
Asquith.

Carson, that the position of the Secretary of State for War under it would become one both of difficulty and weakness. On him would fall all the brunt of battling with the naval and military Chiefs, afloat, in the field and at home—now restraining the Generals from their costly offensives, now stimulating the Admirals to make a greater and more aggressive contribution to the waging of the war. Acute differences were certain to develop in both directions between the political and the professional views. The appeal in all cases would have been to the Prime Minister who, free from the friction of the discussions of the War Committee, yet fully informed on every point, would have been able to decide with final authority. On the other hand, Mr. Lloyd George, publicly appointed to preside over the Committee actually directing the conduct of the war, would have been held responsible for every misfortune that occurred, and they were bound to be many. I warned the Secretary of State for War, when he told me what was passing, of these obvious dangers, but he was determined to persist in his course. Friendly interviews with the Prime Minister led to an almost complete settlement. But at the last moment the personal antagonisms which had been latent in the Liberal section of the Cabinet asserted themselves. A leading article in *The Times*, erroneously attributed to Lord Northcliffe, led Mr. Asquith to consider the proposed arrangement derogatory to himself and to his position. He thereupon withdrew his provisional assent, and the Secretary of State for War resigned.

The resignation of Mr. Lloyd George led immediately to the fall of the Government. Mr. Bonar Law felt it would be impossible for him to remain in an Administration from which Mr. Lloyd George had resigned on the ground that the war direction was unsatisfactory. He and—after considerable heart-searchings—most of his friends therefore associated themselves with the Secretary of State for War. The intense passions which the distress and perplexity of the hour aroused on every side made all hope of accommodation impossible. On December 5, Mr. Asquith tendered to the King his resignation and that of his Ministry. Mr.

Bonar Law, summoned by the Sovereign, advised that Mr. Lloyd George was the only possible successor. Every effort to induce Mr. Asquith to associate himself with the new Administration was made without success. Followed by all his Liberal colleagues, with the exception of Mr. Lloyd George, he retired into patriotic opposition, and the new Triumvirate of Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson assumed, with what were in practice dictatorial powers, the direction of affairs. These decisions were not challenged by Parliament, were accepted by the nation, and were acclaimed by the Press.

The new Prime Minister wished to include me in his Government; but this idea was received with extreme disfavour by important personages whose influence during this crisis was decisive. Lord Northcliffe was animated at this time by a violent hostility to me. He made haste to announce in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* that it had been firmly resolved to exclude from office those who had been responsible for the failures of the war, and that the public would 'learn with relief and satisfaction that Mr. Churchill would not be offered any post in the new Administration.' He also endeavoured—though happily without success—to veto the appointment of Mr. Balfour as Foreign Secretary. Four prominent Conservatives, judged indispensable to the new combination, signed or made a statement stipulating as a condition of taking office that neither I nor Lord Northcliffe should be Ministers. To this extent therefore—though perhaps in a manner scarcely complimentary to himself—Lord Northcliffe received a powerful reinforcement in his view. It could certainly be adduced with validity that my conduct while First Lord was *sub judice* until the Dardanelles Commission had presented its report. Mr. Lloyd George was in no position in these circumstances to resist this oddly combined but formidable cabal. He therefore sent me a message a few days later, through a common friend, Lord Riddell, that he was determined to achieve his purpose, but that the adverse forces were too strong for the moment. I replied through the same channel with a verbal declaration of political independence.

I was of course bitterly disappointed at finding no sphere

Lloyd
George
Prime Min-
ister.

My Exclusion.

of action in a Ministry with whose aims and temper I was in the most complete accord. In time of peace political office is often a doubtful blessing, and a man is not seldom happier out than in. But in this World War a great official place, especially one connected with the fighting Services, was perhaps equal in scope to the command of an Army or even a group of armies; and loaded with my special knowledge and share in the whole series of events with which this story is concerned, I found a sentence of continued and indefinite inactivity almost unendurable. I realized however that the Parliamentary situation had been materially changed by the expulsion of Mr. Asquith and the official Liberal Party from the Government. The Opposition benches were now crowded with Members, patriotic and earnest for victory, but nevertheless filled with resentment at the summary manner in which their Leader and their Party had been treated. As a Privy Councillor I still had my seat on the front Opposition bench, with all the opportunities of intervention in debate which it confers on anyone, and which it confers in special measure on one who has no relations except those of personal courtesy with its other occupants.

My opportunity came in May. Feelings of anxiety and distrust boiled up against the new Government. It must be remembered that apart from Mr. Lloyd George's personal following, which might have amounted to one hundred but was an uncertain quantity, the House of Commons still contained a Liberal, Labour and Irish Nationalist majority of nearly one hundred and fifty. The bulk were definitely hostile to him—for the most part not without reason. A series of appreciable tremors heralded a phase of acute political tension. I therefore advised Mr. Lloyd George, as on a former occasion I had vainly advised Mr. Asquith, to hold a secret Session and take the House fully into the confidence of the Government. It was impossible in public debates, of which the enemy a few days later were readers, either for well-grounded criticisms to be expressed or for the Executive to lay even the outline of their case before the House. I was sure that the Government would emerge from a secret debate in an improved relation to the

House as a whole. The absurd rumours and charges with which the Lobbies, the Clubs and the dinner-tables buzzed would be dissipated. Whatever the difficulties, whatever the mistakes, a Government which is sincerely trying its best and is swayed by no Party bias has everything to gain from the fullest statement of its case which the public interest renders possible.

The Secret Session.

I expressed these views to the Prime Minister through his Whip, Captain Guest, and learned a few days later that he had decided to accept them. A secret Session was announced for May 10. Mr. Asquith and the official Opposition had not asked for such a procedure. They maintained a neutral and a passive attitude in regard to it. It fell therefore to me to open the Debate.

The day came. The Members' and Strangers' Galleries were cleared, but every other part of the House was densely crowded with anxious Members. I was listened to for an hour and a quarter with strained attention, at first silently but gradually with a growing measure of acceptance and at length approval. At the end there was quite a demonstration. A summary of the argument will here serve the purpose of the general narrative.¹

'A new campaign is about to open. Since the beginning of the year two events have occurred, each of which has changed the whole situation and both of which must be taken into account in the policy of the Allies. The United States has entered the war, and Russia has collapsed. On the one hand, an Ally Empire whose standing Army comprised over seven million soldiers has been crushed by the German hammer. On the other, a nation comprising one hundred and twenty millions of the most active, educated and wealthy citizens, commanding intact and almost limitless resources of every kind, has engaged itself in our cause. But this nation is not ready. It has no large armies and no munitions. Its manhood is untrained to war. Its arsenals and factories, except in so far as they are engaged in producing munitions for the Allies, are unorganized. If time is given, nothing can stand against Great Britain and the United States together. If every Ally fails except these two, they could alone together carry the war against the

¹ No record exists of this debate. But from my notes I can reconstruct the outline of the argument.

Teutonic Empires to a victorious conclusion. But a long time will be needed—a time measured not by months but by years—before this mighty force can be brought to bear.

‘There is one other factor besides time which is vital: Sea Communications. And in this sphere a third new situation of decisive consequence has also developed. When the Germans decided upon the unrestricted submarine campaign, they must have known that they would bring the United States into the war against them. Must they not also have believed that by this same means they would prevent her effective intervention? We do not know, we do not wish to know how many ships are being sunk each week by submarines. We know that the number and proportion is most serious and is still increasing. Here then is the fatal crux. Here then is the first and decisive danger to master. Let the whole energies of Britain be directed upon this point. Let the Navy make of it its great victory in the war. Let every resource and invention be applied. Let the anti-submarine war claim priority and dominance over every other form of British effort. Let us make sure that we can bring the American Armies to Europe as soon as they are fit to come.

‘Meanwhile what should be our policy on land? Is it not obvious, from the primary factors which have been described, that we ought not to squander the remaining armies of France and Britain in precipitate offensives before the American power begins to be felt on the battlefields? We have not the numerical superiority necessary for such a successful offensive. We have no marked artillery preponderance over the enemy. We have not got the numbers of tanks which we need. We have not established superiority in the air. We have discovered neither the mechanical nor the tactical methods of piercing an indefinite succession of fortified lines defended by German troops. Shall we then in such circumstances cast away our remaining man power in desperate efforts on the Western Front before large American forces are marshalled in France? Let the House implore the Prime Minister to use the authority which he wields, and all his personal weight, to prevent the French and British High Commands from dragging each other into fresh bloody and disastrous adventures. Master the U-boat attack. Bring over the American millions. And meanwhile maintain an active defensive on the Western Front, so as to economize French and British lives, and so as to train, increase and perfect our armies and our methods for a decisive effort in a later year.’

The Prime Minister replied after a short interval. He accepted in principle my general statement of the main factors. He expressed a great measure of agreement with the argument I had used. But he declined to commit himself against a renewed offensive. Indeed, he gave the impression that such a decision was beyond his power. (Alas, as we shall see, he was already deeply and personally committed.) He then proceeded to lead a captivated assembly over the whole scene of the war, gaining the sympathy and conviction of his hearers at every stage. When he sat down the position of the Government was stronger than it had been at any previous moment during his Administration.

Deepening
Peril.

Shortly after his speech we met fortuitously behind the Speaker's chair. In his satisfaction at the course the Debate had taken, he assured me of his determination to have me at his side. From that day, although holding no office, I became to a large extent his colleague. He repeatedly discussed with me every aspect of the war and many of his secret hopes and fears. On the submarine war he was always undaunted. Week by week as April advanced the horrible curve of sinkings crept upwards. To me, then a spectator only, without the anodyne of constant grinding toil, it was torture. If this thin red line plotted on the blue squared paper mounted during May and June at the rate of April, very definite limits would be fixed to our power to continue the war. If it rose at the same or an increasing rate in July, August and September, a peace by negotiation, while enough time and power remained, loomed upon the mind. The position of the British islands and Empire was such that effectual and final interruption of sea communications by any agency meant, not defeat, but destruction. Impotence, starvation, SUBJUGATION stalked across the mental screen. At the worst of course we had many months of fighting time and strength before us. Had we enough time and enough strength to bring the American armies into France? The more one knew about the struggle, the more tormenting was the experience.

As the reader has perceived, these pages reveal, no doubt, my unceasing condemnation of the offensives in France in

Lloyd
George
undaunted.

1917; and I cannot acquit the Prime Minister of his responsibility for not having stopped them. But tragic and costly as were those episodes, they lay in a field of smaller proportions than the struggle with the U-boats. If there was no hope of victory in 1917 for the Allies on land, neither was there any reason to suppose they could themselves be overcome. The great combatants were too equally matched to be able to inflict mortal injury upon each other. Follies, slaughters, heartbreaks—these were the stakes. Ruin was not on the board in France. Her haunt was in the seas.

And it was in facing with unquailing eye these awful contingencies during the opening months of his prime responsibility, that Mr. Lloyd George's greatest service to his countrymen will, I believe, be found by history to reside. Not only undaunted in the face of peril, but roused by each deepening manifestation to fresh energy, he drove the engine of State forward at increasing speed. The War Cabinet shared his burdens. If sometimes this loyal and capable group of men hampered him when he was right, they also furnished him with that environment of sound opinion and solid argument without which his own remarkable qualities of initiative could never have attained full power. They invested him also with a collective authority which rose high and dominating above the fierce pressures of the time.

The new Prime Minister possessed two characteristics which were in harmony with this period of convulsion. First, a power of living in the present, without taking short views. Every day for him was filled with the hope and the impulse of a fresh beginning. He surveyed the problems of each morning with an eye unobstructed by preconceived opinions, past utterances, or previous disappointments and defeats. In times of peace such a mood is not always admirable, nor often successful for long. But in the intense crisis when the world was a kaleidoscope, when every month all the values and relations were changed by some prodigious event and its measureless reactions, this inexhaustible mental agility, guided by the main purpose of Victory, was a rare advantage. His intuition fitted the crisis better than the logical reasoning of more rigid minds.

The quality of living in the present and starting afresh each day led directly to a second and invaluable aptitude. Mr. Lloyd George in this period seemed to have a peculiar power of drawing from misfortune itself the means of future success. From the U-boat depredations he obtained the convoy system: out of the disaster of Caporetto he extracted the Supreme War Council: from the catastrophe of the 21st of March he drew the Unified Command and the immense American reinforcement.

His Qualities, Energy and Resolution.

His ascendancy in the high circles of British Government and in the councils of the Allies grew in the teeth of calamities. He did not sit waiting upon events to give a wiseacre judgment. He grappled with the giant events and strove to compel them, undismayed by mistakes and their consequences. Tradition and convention troubled him little. He never sought to erect some military or naval figure into a fetish behind whose reputation he could take refuge. The military and naval hierarchies were roughly handled and forced to adjust themselves to the imperious need. Men of vigour and capacity from outside the Parliamentary sphere became the ministerial heads of great departments. He neglected nothing that he perceived. All parts of the task of Government claimed his attention and interest. He lived solely for his work and was never oppressed by it. He gave every decision when it was required. He scarcely ever seemed to bend under the burden. To his native adroitness in managing men and committees he now added a high sense of proportion in war policy and a power of delving to the root of unfamiliar things. Under his Administration both the Island and the Empire were effectually organized for war. He formed the Imperial War Cabinet which centred in a single executive the world-spread resources of the British Monarchy. The convoy system, which broke the U-boat attack at sea; the forward impulsion in Palestine, which overwhelmed the Turks, and the unified command which inaugurated the victories in France, belonged in their main stress and resolve as acts of policy to no one so much as to the First Minister of the Crown.

CHAPTER XI

GENERAL NIVELLE'S EXPERIMENT

Joffre's Plans for 1917—His Decline—A New Figure—The Final Scene—The Appointment of Nivelle—The Nivelle-Mangin Model—The Sudden, Violent Blow—Nivelle's Extensions of Joffre's Plans—Nivelle and Haig—Nivelle's Relations with the War Cabinet—Unified Command—Ludendorff intervenes—*Alberich*—Nivelle's Repugnance to Facts—His Secret Memorandum captured—Intense German Preparation—Fall of Briand's Government—Power and Opinions of Painlevé—French Misgivings—New Factors—Nivelle Inflexible—The Eve of Battle—The Sixteenth of April—British Persistency—Lloyd George and the French Government—His Exhortation—The French Mutinies—Pétain's Achievement.

Joffre's
Plans for
1917.

GENERAL JOFFRE'S plan for the campaign of 1917 was simple. It was to be a continuation of the Battle of the Somme, with only the shortest possible interlude during the extreme severity of the winter. The salient formed by the German line was to be crunched by convergent assaults of the British and the French. No time was to be lost in regrouping the armies; no delay was to be allowed for the arrival even of friendly reinforcements, or for the completion of the new artillery and munitions programmes of the Allies. February 1 was fixed for the opening of the new battle. All the British forces available for the offensive and the northern group of the French armies were to attack due east, the British from Vimy to Bapaume, the French between the Somme and the Oise; simultaneously another French Army of the centre group was to strike northward from the direction of Rheims. Then, after all these armies had been in full battle for a fortnight and the Germans if not broken were thoroughly gripped, the Fifth French Army, supported by the Reserve group to which it belonged, was to strike in to decide the struggle or exploit the victory. Taken in an enormous purse, or as between gigantic pincers, the German armies, if their

front gave way on any considerable scale, were to see themselves confronted first with the capture of very large numbers of men and enormous masses of material, and secondly with a rupture of the front so wide as to be irreparable. His Decline.

Such were the proposals which the French Generalissimo laid before the Allied Statesmen and Commanders at a Conference at Chantilly on November 16, 1916, and which he expounded with precision in his Instruction of November 27. 'I have decided to seek the rupture of the enemy's forces by a general offensive executed between the Somme and the Oise at the same time as the British Armies carry out a similar operation between Bapaume and Vimy. This offensive will be in readiness for the 1st February, 1917, the exact date being fixed in accordance with the general military situation of the Allies.'

As will be seen as the account progresses, the launching of these tremendous operations from the beginning and during the whole of February would have caught the Germans at a moment exceedingly unfavourable to them. Here perhaps at last, after so many regrettable misadventures and miscalculations, Joffre might have won unchallenged laurels. But these possibilities remain in the mists of the unknown; for at this very moment Joffre was removed from his command, and the supreme direction passed to another hand.

Although the fame of Verdun and the Somme had been valiantly trumpeted by Press and propaganda to the uttermost ends of the earth, instructed opinion in Paris was under no illusions about either battle. The glory of Verdun belonged to the French soldiers, who under Castelnau, Pétain, Nivelle and Mangin had sustained the honour of France. The neglect and inadequacy of its defences was clearly traceable to the Commander-in-Chief. His astonishing correspondence with Galliéni in December, 1915, had already been read in secret session to the Chamber in July; and although Briand had sustained the Commander-in-Chief, he had clearly intimated that his retention of the command must be reviewed at a more propitious season. To remove him while the Battle of Verdun was at its height, when the offensive he had concerted with the British on the Somme

A New
Figure.

had just begun, and before that battle and the hopes involved in it had reached their conclusion, could not, he had urged, be in accordance with the interests of France. But the Battle of the Somme was now over. Its last engagement had been fought, and, for all the heroism and sacrifice of the soldiers, fought without decisive gains. The German line, sorely pressed, had nevertheless been maintained unbroken. Nay, some of the troops¹ to invade Roumania had actually been drawn from the Western Front. Roumania had been destroyed and the German prestige re-established as the year, so terrible in its slaughters, drew to a crimson close. Now was a time of reckoning.

Now also for the first time Briand considered himself to have discovered a fitting and suitable successor to Joffre. The three great Chiefs of the French Army, the war horses of the fighting front, Commanders of armies or groups of armies since the beginning of the war—Foch, Castelnau, Pétain—were all for reasons which seemed sufficient at the time ruled out. Of Castelnau it was said by the Socialist left that he was too religious. Of Pétain it was complained that he was not sufficiently gracious to members of the Parliamentary Commissions and other persons of distinction who visited his headquarters. And it was stated that General Sarraill, speaking to Clémenceau in August, 1915, had said of him, 'Il n'est pas des nôtres' (He's not one of us), to which that grand old man had replied, 'What do I care for that, if he can win us a victory?' But Clémenceau's day had not yet dawned, and the Sarraill suggestion festered wherever it had reached. Of Foch a keen propaganda, widespread but untraceable, had said 'His health is broken; his temper and his nerves have given way. He is finished.' So much for Castelnau, Pétain and Foch.

But now a new figure had appeared. Nivelle had conducted the later battle of Verdun both with vigour and success, and under his orders Mangin had recovered the famous Fort of Douaumont. In the mood of the hour Joffre had already selected Nivelle to replace Foch. Forthwith a stream of celebrities took the road to Verdun and

¹ The Alpine Corps and the 187th Brigade.

made for the first time the acquaintance of the new Army Commander. They found themselves in the presence of an officer whose modesty, whose personality, whose lucidity of expression, exercised an almost universal charm. A stream of glowing and delighted accounts flowed towards Paris. There can be no doubt of the attraction exercised by General Nivelle over the many experienced men of affairs with whom he came in contact. Briand, his Ministers, the delegations from the Chamber, were as swiftly impressed as Lloyd George and the British War Cabinet a few months later. Add to these pleasing impressions the glamour of unquestioned and newly won military achievement, and the elements of an alternative Commander-in-Chief were not in that weary moment lacking.

The Final
Scene.

On December 27, Joffre was promoted Marshal of France and relieved of his command. A pleasing and pathetic personal light is thrown on the closing scene by Pierrefeu's skilful pen. No one has been a more stern or more instructed critic of General Joffre. His searching studies, made with the fullest knowledge of events and first-hand observation, have been more fatal to the Joffre legend than all the other attacks and exposures which have appeared in France. But Pierrefeu lights his severe pictures with many a deft and human touch. He has described the curious spectacle of Joffre's life at Chantilly during these two tremendous years. 'This office without maps;' 'this table without papers;' the long hours passed by the Commander-in-Chief in reading and in answering tributes of admiration received from all over the world; his comfortable and placid routine; his air of leisure and serenity; his excellent appetite and regular customs; his long full nights of unbroken repose far from the crash of the cruel cannonade, 'cette vie de bon rentier au plus fort de la guerre.' He tells us of Joffre's habit when in difficulties with the enemy or with his Government, of patting his massive head with his hand and ejaculating with a droll air, 'Pauvre Joffre.' He tells us of his little aide-de-camp Captain Thouzelier; so familiar a figure during all this period, flitting to and fro among the bureaux of the Grand Quartier Général, everywhere known as 'Tou

The Ap-
pointment
of Nivelle.

Tou.' And how in moments of good humour and as a special compliment Joffre would address him as 'Sacré Thouzelier.' It is from such details that an impression is obtained of real historic value. But the picture is now to fade and vanish for ever.

'The new Marshal assembled at the Villa Poiret his principal officers to bid them his adieux: the ceremony was sad. All these men were painfully affected at the idea of separation from the illustrious man who had directed them for so long. Each bore in his breast the anxiety for a future which seemed sombre. The Marshal, who by his rank had the right to three orderly officers, asked who among those present wished to accompany him in his retirement. Alone the Commandant Thouzelier lifted spontaneously his hand. As the Marshal seemed astonished, General Gamelin said to him softly, "Don't bear a grudge to those who have their career to make." And certainly Joffre never bore any such grudge. When all the company had gone, the Marshal cast a final glance at the house which had nursed so much glory. Then with a smile and giving a friendly tap to his faithful Thouzelier, passing his hand across his head, he uttered his favourite expression, "Pauvre Joffre—Sacré Thouzelier."'¹

The appointment of General Nivelle was clearly a very questionable proceeding. There are enormous dangers in selecting for the command of the National Army or Fleet some comparatively junior officer, however well supported by subordinate achievement. To supersede not only Joffre, but Foch, Castelnau, Pétain, by a General like Nivelle, who had only commanded a single army for five months, was a step which could only be vindicated by extraordinary results. Happier would it have been for General Nivelle had he been left to make his way step by step in the high circles of command to which his good conduct and substantial qualities had won him admission.

Meanwhile the French Staff in the dusk of Joffre had formed new conceptions on tactics. The principle that 'the Artillery conquers the ground and the Infantry occupies it,' which had played a comforting, if somewhat barren, part in 1915

¹ Pierrefeu: G.Q.G., Section I.

and 1916, was to a large extent discarded in favour of greater audacity. The Nivelle-Mangin exploit on October 24 at Verdun had tended to become the model of the French Staff. It was the foundation, not only of General Nivelle's fame, but of his convictions. It comprised the whole of his message. He believed that he and his principal officers had found a sure, swift method of rupturing the German defence. He believed further that his method was capable of application on the largest possible scale. Multiply the scale of such an attack ten or fifteen times, and the resultant advantages would be multiplied in an even greater proportion. Just as Falkenhayn in his scheme of attack on Verdun had always in his mind the victory of Gorlice-Tarnow, so Nivelle a year later founded his hopes and reasoning upon his achievement at Douaumont.

The Nivelle-
Mangin
Model.

No one will undervalue the tactics which gained success on October 24. They were hammered out by fighting Generals amidst the fiercest fires. However, it does not follow in war or in some other spheres that methods which work well on a small scale will work well on a great scale. As military operations become larger, they become more ponderous, and the time factor begins to set up complex reactions. Where days of preparation had sufficed, months may be required. Secrets that can be kept for days are apt to wear out in months. Surprise, the key to victory, becomes harder to secure with every additional man and gun. There were in the Nivelle-Mangin methods and in the spirit which animated them the elements of decisive success. But their authors had not learned to apply them on the gigantic scale with which they were now to be concerned: nor in the year 1917 did they possess the necessary superiority of force in its various forms. It was reserved for Ludendorff, on March 21, 1918, to execute what Nivelle had conceived, to combine audacity of action with a true sense of values, to make long preparations without prematurely losing secrecy, and to effect a strategic surprise on a front of fifty divisions. But this comparison cannot even be suggested without numerous reservations arising from the different circumstances.

Nivelle became Commander-in-Chief on December 12. He arrived at Chantilly on the 16th; and on that same date

The Sudden
and Violent
Blow.

there issued from the French High Command a Memorandum on the new (Verdun) methods of the offensive which had no doubt been drawn up during the preceding month while Joffre still ruled, to greet the advent of the new Chief. General Nivelle lost no time in developing this theme in his own words. On December 21, in a letter to Sir Douglas Haig and in instructions to his own groups of armies, he wrote :

‘The objective which the Franco-British armies should seek, is the destruction of the principal mass of the enemy. This result can only be attained as the consequence of a decisive battle’ . . .¹

On the 24th, in a further Note to his Army Group Commanders, communicated to the British Staff, he affirmed :

‘That the rupture of the front (penetration to the rear of the mass of the hostile batteries) is possible on condition it is made at a single stroke by a sudden attack in 24 or 48 hours.’²

And on January 29 to General Micheler whom he had placed in command of the three armies destined for the main attack, he emphasized ‘the character of violence, of brutality, and of rapidity which should clothe the offensive, and in particular its first phase, the break-through.’

These quotations are typical of a continued flow of instructions and exhortations which General Nivelle, his Verdun Confraternity, and the French Headquarter Staff dutifully toiling behind them, lavished week after week upon their armies and their Allies.

The reader will remember Colonel de Grandmaison the Director of Operations of the years before the war, the Apostle of the Offensive, immediately, every time—‘*à outrance, à la baïonnette,*’ etc. War has claimed her Priest. The body of Colonel de Grandmaison lies mouldering in the

¹ ‘Le but que les armées franco-britanniques doivent atteindre, est la destruction de la masse principale des forces ennemies. Ce résultat ne peut être obtenu qu’à la suite d’une bataille décisive.’

² ‘Que la rupture de front (pénétration jusqu’en arrière du gros des batteries ennemies) est possible, à condition de se faire d’un seul coup par attaque brusquée en 24 ou 48 heures.’

grave—a grave, let no one fail to declare, guarded by the reputation of a brave gentleman eager to give his life for his country and his theories. He has fallen; but his theme has found a fleeting resting-place in the bosom of Colonel d'Alenson, Chief of the Staff of General Nivelle. Pierrefeu gives a vivid description of this officer who flitted so suddenly, so swiftly and so tragically across the scene. Immensely tall and thin, dark, sallow, cadaverous, silent, sombre, full of suppressed fire—a man absorbed in his convictions and ideas. The astonishing rocket rise of Nivelle had carried d'Alenson as an attendant star to the military zenith. But there is this fact about him which should be noted—he had but one year to live, and consequently but one coup to play. Gripped in the closing stages of consumption, he knew that his time was short. Still, short as it was, there was a deed to do which might win enduring honour. Such a personal situation is not favourable to the practical common sense and judgment peculiarly required in a Chief of Staff.

Nivelle's
Extensions
of Joffre's
Plans.

Fortune had no sooner hoisted General Nivelle to the topmost summit of power than she deserted him. From the moment of his assuming command of the French armies everything went against him. He was from the outset more successful in exciting the enthusiasm of the political than of the military leaders: and he was more successful with the British Government even than with his own. He proceeded immediately to extend the scope of the immense operations which had been contemplated by Joffre. In his general offensive against the German salient Joffre had been careful to avoid the formidable span of thirty kilometres from Soissons to Craonne along the Aisne so well known to the British in 1914. General Nivelle ordered an additional offensive to be mounted against this front, and another further to the East at Moronvillers. Joffre had planned to attack at the earliest moment, even if it involved the sacrifice of some degree of preparation. Not only must Nivelle's scale be larger, but his preparations must be more detailed and complete; and for all this he was willing to pay in terms of time. Whereas the French Staff under Joffre had defined

Nivelle and
Haig.

his aim as 'la recherche de la rupture du dispositif ennemi,' Nivelle claimed nothing less than 'la destruction de la masse principale des armées ennemies.' Whereas Joffre had contemplated a revival of the Somme battle on a still larger scale and under more favourable conditions, with three or four tremendous attacks engaging successively over a period of weeks the front and resources of the Germans, Nivelle proclaimed the doctrine of the sudden general onslaught culminating in victory or defeat within twenty-four, or at the most forty-eight, hours. And whereas Joffre would have struck early in February, Nivelle's extensions involved delay till April. The effect of the Nivelle alterations upon the Joffre plan was to make it larger, more violent, more critical, and much later.

On December 20, Nivelle explained his ideas to Sir Douglas Haig and invited him to recast the previous plans and extend the British Right from Bouchavesnes to the road from Amiens to Roye. These discussions—not to say disputes—between the French and British Headquarters upon the share which each should assume upon the front were continuous throughout the war. All followed the same course; the French dwelt on the number of kilometres they guarded, the British on the number of German divisions by which they were confronted, and each reinforced these potent considerations by reminding their Ally that they were about to deliver or sustain a major offensive. On this occasion, however, Haig was not unwilling to meet the wishes of the French Command. He was in favour of renewing the offensive in France and was ready to fall in with Nivelle's views as to its direction and scope. Moreover, when the French wished to assume the brunt of the new attack and asked for assistance for this purpose, it was hardly for the British to refuse. On December 25 therefore Haig wrote to Nivelle, 'I agree in principle with your proposals and am desirous of doing all I can to help you on the lines you suggest.' He also undertook to extend the British front from February 1 as far as the Amiens-St. Quentin Road. Both Haig and the British Headquarters were however extremely sceptical of the power of the French Army to carry out the part

assigned to it in the ambitious programme of General Nivelle. They were further greatly preoccupied by the condition of the Nord railway which, as maintained by the French, was at this time quite inadequate to sustain the important operations expected of the British Army. They therefore pressed for the improvement of their communications and declared themselves unable to fix a date for the British offensive while this extremely practical point remained unsettled.

Nivelle's
Relations
with the
War Cabi-
net.

In the course of these discussions the first hint of the proposed renewal of the offensive and of its changed form was conveyed to the British War Cabinet on December 26. Monsieur Ribot who had come to London stated that the new French Commander had an idea of breaking through on a wide front, keeping in reserve an army of manœuvre to carry on the attack after the line had been broken. For this to be achieved the British Army must add 30 or 40 kilometres to their present line. Mr. Lloyd George was at first adverse to the renewal of the offensive in France and especially to the renewal of a long offensive like the Somme. In all our talks before he had become Prime Minister I had found him in sympathy with my general views on this subject. His first effort on obtaining power was to find some alternative. At the Rome Conference which he attended at the beginning of January he developed the proposal for a heavy attack on the Austrian front, mainly by Italian troops supported by an enormous concentration of Anglo-French batteries. The French, under the Nivelle influence, opposed this plan. Sir William Robertson gave it no support and it was merely remitted to the Staffs to study. As the train bringing the Prime Minister home from Italy waited at the Gare du Nord, General Nivelle presented himself and unfolded his scheme in outline. The first impressions on both sides were favourable. Nivelle was invited to London and met the War Cabinet on January 15. His success was immediate. The British Ministers had never before met in Council a general who could express himself in forceful and continuous argument, and they had never before met a French general whom they could understand. Nivelle not only spoke lucidly, he spoke English. He

Unified
Command.

had not only captured Fort Douaumont, but had an English mother. He explained that his method involved no resumption of the prolonged Somme battles but one short, sharp, decisive rupture. Mr. Lloyd George's resistance to the new offensive plan had been melting rapidly since the meeting at the Gare du Nord. It was soon to transform itself into ardent support. Haig was also in London; he and Robertson were summoned to the Council, and a Memorandum was drawn up and signed by all three Generals formally approving a renewed offensive on the Western Front to begin not later than April 1, with consequential preliminary extensions of the British Front.

So far all had been harmonious, but the Prime Minister in the process of being converted from his previous opposition to the offensive had evolved a further design. He was already set upon his great and simple conception of a united command. Like the War Cabinet he was attracted by the personality of General Nivelle and disposed to back him—if at all—whole-heartedly. It was believed that better war direction could be obtained from the French. It was also believed—and in this case with far more justification—that one single controlling hand ought to prevail on the whole of the Western Front. 'It is not,' as Lloyd George said when later in the war he had gained his point, 'that one General is better than another, but that one General is better than two.' So Nivelle returned to Chantilly carrying the virtual promise of the Prime Minister that Haig and the British Army should be subordinated to his directions. These important additional developments were not at this stage imparted by the Prime Minister or the War Cabinet to either Robertson or Haig.

During January the inadequacy of the rolling stock on the Nord railway became so marked that after strenuous British protests another conference was convened at Calais on February 26. The French then produced a detailed scheme of organization for an allied G.H.Q. in France. This provided for a French Generalissimo with a Headquarters Staff of French and British Officers under a British Chief of Staff. A British Commander-in-Chief was to be retained in name for Adjutant-General's work, but

without influence upon operations. The immediate resistance of the British Generals led to this proposal being put aside, and instead an agreement was drawn up placing the control of the forthcoming operations solely in Nivelle's hands and the British Army under his orders for that period. To this Haig and Robertson—lest worse should befall—agreed.

Ludendorff
intervenes.

The episode—in itself remarkable—had sensibly impaired the relations between the British and French Headquarters. It seemed to the British High Command that Nivelle had been concerned in an attempt with their own Government to procure their subordination to himself, if not indeed their supersession. From the outset they had viewed the appointment of the new Commander-in-Chief over the heads of all the best-known French soldiers with some surprise. Now mistrust and resentment were added. When on the strength of his new authority Nivelle sent instructions to Haig, couched in a tone of command, directing him to give up the long-planned British attack upon the Vimy Ridge in favour of the operations further to the South of Arras, Haig refused to comply. He applied to the British Government and 'requested to be told whether the War Cabinet wished the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force should be subject to such treatment by a junior foreign commander.' The strain was sharp. A compromise was eventually reached, but the friendly and intimate co-operation which had existed for so long between the British and French Staffs had undergone a noticeable decline, and Nivelle was criticized in French high military circles for having provoked this unfavourable result.

At this moment an unexpected event occurred. Ludendorff intervened, and the Germans acted. The great military personality which Germany had discovered in her need, armed in the panoply and under the ægis of Hindenburg, by one sure stroke overturned all the strategy of General Nivelle. Towards the end of February the German evacuation of the whole sector from Arras to Noyon began. Leaving a screen of troops to occupy the abandoned positions and fire off their guns and rifles, the German Army withdrew fifty

Alberich.

miles from the threatened area of the salient, and with unhurried deliberation assumed their new deeply considered positions on what was henceforward to be known as the Hindenburg line. The German General Staff called this long prepared operation by the code name *Alberich*, after the malicious dwarf of the Nibelungen legend. They left their opponents in the crater fields of the Somme, and with a severity barbarous because far in excess of any military requirements, laid waste with axe and fire the regions which they had surrendered.

The retrograde movement, rumoured for some days, was first detected on the front of the British Fifth Army. On February 24 suspicion was aroused by the German artillery shelling its own trench lines. British patrols found the hostile trenches empty. The Fifth Army Operations Order of that same night said 'The enemy is believed to be withdrawing.' Immense clouds of smoke and the glare of incendiary fires by night proclaimed the merciless departure of the enemy. On the 25th he was reported as much as 18,000 yards back in certain sectors, and on February 28 the British Intelligence spoke of a retirement to the Hindenburg line.

However absorbed a Commander may be in the elaboration of his own thoughts, it is necessary sometimes to take the enemy into consideration. Joffre's plan had been to bite the great German salient in February; and whether it would have succeeded or not, no man can tell. The Nivelle plan was to bite it with still larger forces in April. But by March the salient had ceased to exist. Three out of Nivelle's five armies, which were to have been employed in the assault, were now separated by a gulf of devastated territory from their objective. All their railroads, all their roads, all their magazines were so far removed from the enemy's positions that at least two months would be required to drag them forward into a new connection with the war. The remaining two armies were left with no other possibility before them than to deliver disconnected frontal attacks on the strongest parts of the old German line.

In these circumstances Nivelle's *Directive* to the British armies under his control is of great interest.

G.Q.G.,

March 6, 1917.

Direction for the Marshal.

The retirement of the enemy on the front of the Fifth British Army constitutes a new fact, the repercussion of which upon the joint offensive of the Franco-British Armies must be examined.

Nivelle's
Repugnance
to Facts.

So far the retreat of the Germans has only been carried out on the front of the Fifth British Army. It will perhaps be extended to the region of the Somme and the Oise. But in any case there is no indication which would allow us to suppose that the enemy will act similarly on the front of attack of your Third and First Armies, any more than on that of the G.A.R. (Reserve Group). On the contrary, the so-called Hindenburg position is so disposed that the directions of our principal attacks, both in the British and the French zones, are such that they will outflank it and take it in reverse.

*In this respect the German retirement may be entirely to our advantage, even if it becomes general ; and on this assumption I base a first decision, which is not to modify in any fundamental way the general plan of operations already settled,*¹ and in particular to stick to the date fixed for the launching of our attacks.

It must, however, be admitted that all our operations cannot be carried out in the way arranged, and I will therefore examine in succession the attitude to be adopted on the front of the British Armies and of the G.A.N. (Northern Group).

Distance, numbers, direction—all were changed. Yet it was decreed that the principle was unaffected and that the enterprise should proceed.

We have seen the tactical characteristics of the Joffre plan as developed by General Nivelle ; the gigantic scale of the attack, its convergence upon the German salient ; the minute study of detail and its comprehension by all ranks ; and lastly, most precious and vital of all, the brutal, violent explosion of surprise. Of these four conditions, the Scale had been reduced by half, and the Convergence practically prevented by the German retreat. The other two—Detail and Surprise—were destined to destroy one another.

¹ My italics.

His Secret
Memo-
randum
captured.

The progress of the immense preparations on those parts of the British and French fronts still in offensive relation to the enemy was continually visible from the air. From the south of Arras to the south of Soissons along a front of nearly 150 kilometres the Germans knew that since their retirement they could not be attacked. The 20-kilometres sector before Arras and perhaps a hundred kilometres in Champagne remained the only dangerous fronts. On these fronts they could watch each day the gathering of the storm. Good intelligence and aerial observation enabled the slight uncertainty as to where the main thrusts of the attack would take place to be reduced still further. But information of far greater precision and certainty was soon to be placed at their disposal.

In his desire that all ranks should comprehend the spirit of his plan, and that Battalion Commanders and even Company Commanders should know its whole scope, General Nivelle had caused various documents of high consequence to be circulated among the troops in the line. The first of these was the famous Staff memorandum on the new principles of the offensive dated December 16 which has already been quoted. The imprudence of allowing such a document to pass into the hands of troops holding the line often at even less than 100 yards from the enemy was swiftly punished. On March 3 a raid by a German division of the Crown Prince's army captured this fateful document. 'This memorandum,' writes the Crown Prince,¹ 'contained matter of extraordinary value, it made clear that this time there was to be no question of a limited attack but a break-through offensive on a grand scale was contemplated. . . . The memorandum also made disclosures above all as to the particular nature of the surprise which the attacker had in view. This was based on the fact alleged to have been observed on our side that our defensive artillery as a rule made only a weak reply to the artillery preparation which preceded the attack. The French therefore thought to avoid protracted digging of earthworks for the attacking troops, particularly for the artillery.' . . . 'Graf Von Schulenberg . . . at once formulated the logical

¹ *My War Experiences.*

reply for the defence, the artillery preparation not only to be powerfully returned, but even beforehand all recognized enemy preparations for attack to be overwhelmed by concentrated artillery fire. We ventured to hope that the surprise might in this way be most effectively met and the sting taken out of the first attack, which experience had shown to be the strongest and best prepared.'

Intense
German
Preparation.

All through the month of March, General Nivelle's preparations for surprise continued to rivet the attention of the enemy. 'By April,' writes the Crown Prince, 'a great deal of information already obtained led to the conclusion that the main attack was to be expected before long against the south front of the Seventh and Third Armies west of the Argonne. The Intelligence Service further confirmed the impression left by the French attack memorandum which had been captured. . . . Great depths of artillery, enormous supplies of ammunition, innumerable battery positions directly before the enemy's first line, no strong fortifications of battery positions, simply cover from the enemy's view, complete cessation of hostilities. . . .' Again, 'On April 6 a clever attack by the 10th Reserve Division at Sapiigneul brought us into possession of an order of attack of the French Fifth Army. In it the French attacking units were mentioned by name. The Fifth Army's objective was the line Prouvais-Provisieux-Aumencourt. The Brimont [position] was to be taken by an enveloping movement from the north. Fresh information upon the anticipated French method of attack was given. The last veil concealing the intention of the French offensive was torn aside.'

All this time the Germans, spurred and assisted by the most perfect information, were preparing their defences. The army commands were reorganized. In February, when Nivelle's preparations first began to be obvious, the Crown Prince's command was extended eastwards to include the Seventh Army (of Prince Rupprecht's group), thus unifying the control of the entire front to be attacked. In March a whole additional army—the First—was interpolated between the Seventh and the Third. The Crown Prince's Headquarters were moved from Stenay to Charleville.

Fall of
Briand's
Govern-
ment.

Throughout March the reinforcement of his group of armies was unceasing. Machine-guns, artillery, battle-planes, intelligence service and labour battalions flowed in a broad stream to the threatened front. The relief gained by the Germans in the shortening of their line through their retirement from the salient enabled ever larger forces to be concentrated opposite the impending French attack. Night and day by ceaseless German toil the fortification of the whole area proceeded vehemently. Their position from Soissons to Rheims and beyond Rheims was by nature perhaps the strongest sector of the enemy's front. The Craonne plateau, the long hog's-back of the Chemin des Dames, the wooded bluffs and ridges of the Argonne were all developed by ardent toil into one homogeneous labyrinth of trenches and tunnels, crowded with battalions and machine guns and swathed in tangles of barbed wire. At the beginning of the year eight or nine German divisions had stood upon this front; by the time Nivelle had perfected his plan of surprise forty, a number scarcely inferior to the attack, were waiting to receive him.

Other preoccupations began to gather round General Nivelle. He had been the choice of a French Government whose reputation and existence were largely bound up with his. In Briand, the Premier, and in Lyautey, the Minister of War, he had sponsors who could by no means separate themselves from him. No Government could afford to change their mind about a Commander they had violently elevated above all the recognized chiefs of the profession. But now suddenly this sure support was to fail. Early in March, General Lyautey became entangled in the Parliamentary meshes. He precipitately resigned, and in his fall dragged down Briand and the whole Government. New rulers ascended the tribune of power, with whom Nivelle had no associations but those of hostility. Under a Ribot Administration Painlevé became Minister of War.

Paul Painlevé was a man of marked intellectual distinction, ardent in politics, great in mathematics, a faithful partisan of the Left, and ready to conform to all its formularies so far as a wide interpretation of the public interest allowed. In the original Briand Ministry Painlevé had

been Minister of Education, charged with the study of inventions which might be serviceable to the armies. In this capacity he had constantly and freely toured the front, and discussed not only inventions but plans with most of the important Commanders. He knew them all, and most of them appreciated his keen intellect. Painlevé had discerned Pétain. This General was so cold and reserved to the Members of Parliamentary Commissions that he had incurred damaging unpopularity in influential circles. But Painlevé admired him for his independence, and perhaps Pétain had responded to such a recognition. Painlevé's nominee for the succession to Joffre had been Pétain. When Briand at the end of October, 1916, had reconstructed his Cabinet, he had done so on the basis of the dignified liquidation of Joffre and the enthronement of Nivelle. Painlevé, offered a renewal of his offices, had refused to continue on the specific ground that he did not agree with the appointment of Nivelle. His entrance into the Chamber after this decision—a serious one for any public man to take in time of war—had been marked by a salutation not only from the Left but almost of a general character. Now he was Minister of War, and under the aged Prime Minister, the most important figure in the new French Administration. Instead of a Briand wedded to Nivelle's success, the new Commander-in-Chief now had a Painlevé who, however loyal to his subordinate, had publicly and in advance testified that he regarded his appointment as a mistake.

But Painlevé's objections to Nivelle were not limited to the personal aspect. Painlevé, and the political forces which at that time he embodied, were the declared opponents of the great offensives on the Western Front. He agreed with Pétain that France should not be bled to death, that the life of the French Army must be husbanded, that there was no chance of the break through (*la percée*) in that year in that theatre, that the gradual capture of limited objectives was the only prize within reach, and that moderation of aim and economy of the lives of French soldiers were the key-notes of the immediate military policy. Nivelle stood at the opposite pole: the offensive on the

Power and
Opinions
of Painlevé.

French
Misgivings,

largest scale, the French in the van; the armies hurled on in absolute confidence of decisive victory; the rupture of the German line on an enormous front; the march through the gap of great armies of manœuvre; the re-establishment of open warfare; the expulsion of the invader from the soil of France. Nor were these differences of principle academic. Nivelle was actively planning the most ambitious offensive ever undertaken by the French; and Painlevé was the Minister who had to take responsibility before Parliament and before history for all that Nivelle might try to do. It is not easy to say which of the two men was in the more unpleasant position.

Had Painlevé acted upon his convictions, which in this case were proved right, he would have dismissed Nivelle and appointed to the Chief Command Pétain, in whom he had confidence and with whose general military outlook he and his party were in entire sympathy. But practical difficulties and many valid considerations dissuaded him from decisions which, if he had survived them, would have proved his title-deeds to fame. He temporized. He made the best of the situation as he found it. He bowed—who in great position has not had to do so?—before the day-to-day force and logic of circumstances, before the sullen drift of events. He acquiesced in Nivelle; he submitted to his plans—already so far advanced.

In the face of all the facts which marched upon him grimly and in spite of pressures of every kind, from every side, increasing constantly in severity, General Nivelle displayed an amazing persistence. In February he was aware of Pétain's scepticism, and of misgivings at the British Headquarters about his general plan. When the German retreat was apparent, General Micheler, his own man, chosen specially to command the main offensive, wrote to point out that everything was changed and to ask whether it was wise in the new circumstances to count on 'an exploitation having the rapid character of a forward march.' 'The character of violence, of brutality and of rapidity,' replied Nivelle on April 1, 'must be maintained. It is in the speed and surprise caused by the rapid and sudden irruption of our Infantry upon the

third and fourth positions that the success of the rupture will be found. No consideration should intervene of a nature to weaken the élan of the attack.' Warned that the enemy were fully prepared; knowing as he did before the final signal was given that his detailed plan had fallen into their hands, he still extolled the virtue of Surprise. Behind him stood Colonel d'Alenson with fevered eye and a year to live. At his side was the redoubtable Mangin burning with the ardour of battle, confident that on the evening of the first day of the offensive his cavalry would be scampering in pursuit on the plains of Laon. But elsewhere in the high commands of the armies and in the Bureaux of the Headquarters Staff, doubt and distrust welled in chilling floods.

New Fac-
tors.

Painlevé became Minister of War on March 19. Everyone knew that the offensive was imminent. 'On the 20th,' wrote Painlevé, 'before even being installed in the Ministry, I learned, I might say by public voice, that this was fixed for April 8, and that in consequence the British would attack at Arras on the 4th.' These dates were eventually postponed from day to day by unsuitable weather until April 9 and 16 respectively. On March 22 the Minister had his first interview with the Commander-in-Chief. He told him that it was well known his choice for the Commander of the army would have been different, but that was past, and he could count on his full support. Painlevé proceeded however to point out that the original plan of operations had been affected by a series of first-class events. The German retreat, the outbreak of the Russian revolution, the certain and imminent entry of the United States into the war against Germany—surely these had introduced some modification into the problem. In the name of the Government he urged the General to review the situation and reconsider his position freely, without feeling himself tied by any expectations he had previously formed himself or expressed to others. 'A new situation ought to be considered with a new eye.'

Nivelle's mind was not open to such argument. His confidence was unshakable. According to Painlevé,¹ he

¹ 'Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain.'

Nivelle
Inflexible.

expressed himself as follows: The German retreat did not inconvenience him. It liberated more French than German divisions. He could not himself have prescribed movements of the enemy which would better have favoured his own decisions. The narrowing of the front of attack would be remedied by prolonging the French right and including a portion of the Army group under Pétain, opposite Moronvilliers. The enemy's front would be broken, it might almost be said, without loss. As for the Plateau of Craonne 'he had it in his pocket,' the only thing he feared was that the Germans would make off. The more they reinforced their front the more startling would be the French victory, if only the intensity of the attack were continually increased. Perhaps the third day one might draw breath on the Serre after 30 kilometres of pursuit, but 'it would be difficult to hold the troops back once they got started,' and so on. Such was the mood of General Nivelle.

Upon the new Minister of War there flowed advices of a very different character. Staff Officers of the highest credentials wrote secretly, at the risk of their commissions, solemn, reasoned warnings of the impending disaster, if the orders which had been given were actually carried out. All the three Commanders of army groups, Franchet d'Espérey, Pétain, even Micheler, in respectful but decisive terms dissociated themselves from the idea that a sudden violent rupture of the front was practicable. All three however recognized the danger of allowing the initiative to pass to the enemy. Pétain alone suggested a pregnant alternative, namely to let the Germans attack the French, and then launch the prepared French offensive as a gigantic counter-stroke.

Painlevé summoned a conference which met on the evening of April 3 at the War Ministry, at which the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, together with several other Ministers, were present. He drew General Nivelle's attention to the misgivings of his principal subordinates. To the last Nivelle was undaunted. Complete victory was certain. The first two positions of the enemy would be carried with insignificant loss. Did they think he was unaware that to take the third and fourth positions one

must begin by taking the first and second? No one knew better than he that good weather was essential to his mode of attack. All would be decided in twenty-four hours, or forty-eight at the most. If within that time the rupture was not obtained it would be useless to persevere. 'Under no pretext,' he declared, 'will I recommence a Somme battle.' Finally, if he did not command their confidence, let them appoint a successor. The Ministers were overwhelmed by this extraordinary assurance, and General Nivelle left the conference convinced that the last word had been spoken.

The Eve of
Battle.

Several times in this struggle the name of General Messimy occurs, and always finds itself associated with decided action for good or for ill. We see him in 1911 as War Minister arraigning Michel the Prophet before a Sanhedrin of Generals and dismissing him into the cool shades. We see him on August 25, 1914, again at the centre of power, serving General Joffre with the formal order to assign at least three Army Corps to the defence of Paris, which that General had proposed to declare an 'open town' and to abandon as such. We see him a few days later removed from the War Office by one of the innumerable and to the foreigner baffling shufflings of French politics in the very height and climax of the war's opening convulsion, but not until he had ordered that Paris should be defended, had procured the necessary Army, and had appointed Gallieni, instead of his former victim, Michel, to the vital task. Thereafter at once he takes his place at the head of a Brigade and vanishes into the dust and confusion of the conflict, until now on April 5, 1917, two and a half years later, Messimy emerges quite suddenly with an extremely irregular letter which he presented to Monsieur Ribot. This letter marshalled all the arguments against the offensive. 'Prisoners yes, guns yes, a narrow band of territory of perhaps 10 or 12 kilometres; but at an outrageous cost, and without strategic results. Urgent conclusion—give without losing an hour the order to delay the attack till the weather improves.' These views he declared were written 'almost under the dictation of Micheler,' and represented the conviction of the 'most famous Chiefs of the French Army.'

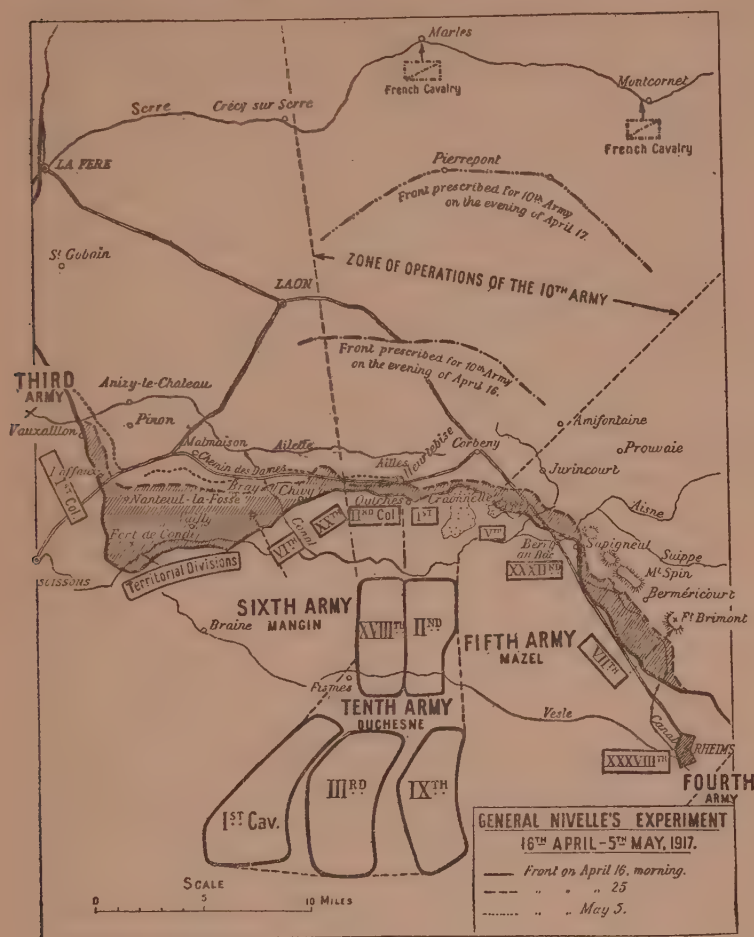
The 16th of
April.

But now the hour was imminent. The vast preparations were everywhere moving forward to explosion-point. The British Cabinet had been won over. The British Headquarters had been persuaded. The co-operation of England, the great Ally, had by a tremendous effort been obtained, and once obtained would be given with crude and downright force. To resist the plan, to dismiss the Commander, meant not only a Ministerial and a Parliamentary crisis—possibly fatal to the Government—but it also meant throwing the whole plan of campaign for the year into the melting-pot, and presumably, though not certainly, resigning the initiative to the Germans. So Nivelle and Painlevé, these two men whose highest ambitions had both been newly and almost simultaneously gratified, found themselves in the most unhappy positions which disillusioned mortals can occupy: the Commander having to dare the utmost risks with an utterly sceptical Chief behind him; the Minister having to become responsible for a frightful slaughter at the bidding of a General in whose capacity he did not believe, and upon a military policy of the folly of which he was justly convinced. Such is the pomp of power!

I shall not attempt to describe the course either of the French offensive which began on April 16 nor of the brilliant preliminary operation by which the British Army at the battle of Arras captured the whole of the Vimy Ridge. Numerous excellent accounts—French, English and German—are extant. It will here be sufficient to say that the French troops attacked in unfavourable weather with their customary gallantry. On a portion of the main front attacked they penetrated to a depth of 3 kilometres; they took between the 16th and the 20th, 21,000 prisoners and 183 guns, lost over 100,000 soldiers and failed to procure any strategic decision. It was only indeed on the fronts of Moronvillers and Soissons-Craonne, added by Nivelle to the attack after the documents captured by the enemy had actually been written, that surprise and success were alike achieved. By the evening of the 16th Nivelle's high hopes and confidence had withered, and his orders for the resumption of battle on the 17th implied not merely

tactical modifications but the substitution of far more moderate strategic aims. The 16th of April.

The later phases of the battle were in some respects more successful than its beginning; nor were the losses of the French so disproportionate to those of the Germans as in



the Joffre offensives. In fact the Nivelle offensive was the least costly, both actually and relatively to the enemy's loss, of any ever undertaken by the French. But the General could never escape from the consequences of his sanguine declarations. Again and again he had affirmed that, unless the rupture was immediate and total 'within twenty-four or forty-eight hours,' it would be useless to

British
Persistence.

continue the operation. He had predicted such a rupture with many circumstances of detail. Almost everyone had doubted before. Now all doubts were certainties. The slaughter, woeful to the shrunken manhood of France, was fiercely exaggerated. Disturbances broke out among the troops, and in the capital a storm of fury arose against the General. His wish to convert the great operation into a more modest enterprise was brushed aside. On April 29 Pétain became, as Chief of the General Staff, the adviser of the French Cabinet on the whole conduct of the military operations.

A peculiar situation followed the collapse of Nivelle's offensive. The British Army had, as we have seen, already entered with vigour and success upon their very important part in the general plan. The victory of Arras, with its capture of the Vimy Ridge, thirteen thousand prisoners and two hundred guns, had been achieved without undue sacrifice. Haig had originally intended to close these operations after the capture of Monchy-le-Preux and to begin as soon as possible the attempt to clear the coastal sector by the capture of the Messines and Paschendaele ridges. But the conditions prevailing in the French Army and in Paris were such that it was thought dangerous to relax even for a few weeks the pressure upon the enemy. The continuance of the British attack was however very costly, and unrewarded by any real success. At an early stage the Germans developed a new method of defence. Holding their front system of trenches with few men, they kept strong forces intact close at hand, and by heavy counter-attacks independently launched they robbed, in nearly every case, the British of their initial gains.

The Prime Minister was himself deeply committed by his facile acceptance of the Nivelle schemes to the offensive mood. He showed himself resolute to persevere. The British Army should be thrown ungrudgingly into the battle of attrition, and every effort must be made to induce the French to exert themselves unceasingly to the utmost. General Headquarters thus found in Mr. Lloyd George at this juncture a strong supporter. His action cannot be judged apart from the situation. The hour was tragic. The

U-boat sinkings for April, surpassing all previous records, had reached the total of 800,000 tons. The fatal curve was still rising, and in British minds it dominated everything. 'Let the armies fight while time remained.' Or in Lord Fisher's challenging phrase, 'Can the Army win the war before the Navy loses it?' Prime Minister, Commander-in-Chief and Sir William Robertson proceeded together to Paris, and in conference on May 4 and 5, Mr. Lloyd George addressed to Messieurs Ribot, Painlevé and General Pétain some of the most strenuous exhortations to continue the offensive that have ever passed between Allies. The whole proceedings of the conference have been published by Mermeix in one of his excellent books.¹ They form an astonishing chapter in Anglo-French relations and in the life of Mr. Lloyd George.

Lloyd
George and
the French
Govern-
ment.

Sir William Robertson sternly demanded a continuance of the offensive, and an agreement on this was reached among the Generals. Then Mr. Lloyd George began. 'We have wished,' he said, 'to make sure that there was agreement between us on the general principle of continuing the offensive with all our resources and with all our energies.' Speaking in the presence of Nivelle and championing his case against his own Government, 'we have no need,' he went on, 'to know the details which concern particularly those who have the direct responsibility for the military operations. We prefer that Generals shall keep their plans of execution to themselves. When plans are put on paper for communication to Ministers, it is rare that the Ministers are the only ones to know them. We do not seek to know the precise plan of attack nor the number of guns or divisions engaged. It is essential that these details remain secret. In England we do not ask such questions. Besides, General Robertson does not encourage us to ask them. We treat him with the respect which he deserves and we refrain from indiscreet curiosity.' Under this allusion Ribot and Painlevé both interrupted to declare themselves in agreement with the rule that apart from general principles and the outline of the plan everything must rest with the Generals alone. Mr. Lloyd George continued: 'In the name of the British

¹ *Nivelle et Painlevé.*

His Exhortations.

Government we declare to you that we approve the military protocol which General Robertson has just read. But there must be no doubt about the sense of this document. Do we mean by an offensive an offensive limiting numbers to two or three divisions, or an offensive of great armies like that which Marshal Haig has launched before Arras? After full consideration the British War Cabinet ask of its French colleagues to push the offensive during the course of this year with all the force of which our two armies are capable.'

He proceeded to dilate upon the results of the offensive so far as it had gone. 'The highest hopes had not been realized, but without hopes, even beyond what is possible, how shall we find the indispensable impetus of war? In spite of all, we have taken 45,000 prisoners, 450 guns, 800 mitrail-leuses, and we secured 200 square kilometres. Supposing it was the Germans who had obtained these results, how great would have been our own discouragement! We ought not to leave the enemy a single moment of rest. If we stopped our offensive or if we limited ourselves to small demonstrations the Germans will say the Allies are beaten and by going on sinking ships we shall starve England and render the continuation of the war impossible.' He concluded by urging the most extreme intensity of action throughout the whole summer. The French Premier responded to this objurgation with some reserve. He undertook to continue the offensive, subject to not squandering the reserves of France. He expressed admiration of the resolute language of Mr. Lloyd George, with which his own sentiments accorded. Painlevé also declared that the battle would continue with all possible energy. 'We have kept our promises and done our part,' was Mr. Lloyd George's final remark, 'and we are confident you will keep yours.'

These undertakings extorted in full conference from the French Government by the imperious Welshman did not accord either with the final decision of the French Staff or the facts of the case. The battle was indeed continued, and during the next fortnight both Craonne and the Chemin des Dames were captured. But upon the very day of the conference in Paris, there had occurred a deeply disquieting incident. A French division ordered into the line refused

to march. The officers succeeded in recalling the soldiers to their duty, and the division took part in the fighting without discredit. It was the first drop before the downpour.

The French
Mutinies.

The demoralization of the French Army was proceeding apace. Want of confidence in their leader, cruel losses and an active defeatist propaganda had produced an intense spasm throughout its ranks. Mutinies—some of a very dangerous character—occurred in sixteen separate Army Corps. Some of the finest troops were involved. Divisions elected councils. Whole regiments set out for Paris to demand a Peace by negotiation and more home leave. A Russian force of about 15,000 Infantry had before the Revolution been sent to be armed and equipped in France. These men were affected by the political developments in their own country. They had put it to the vote whether they should take part in the battle of April 16, and had decided by a majority to do so. They were used by the French in a ruthless manner, and nearly 6,000 had been killed or wounded. The survivors went into open revolt. One sentence in their Manifesto reveals the propaganda of a master hand. 'We have been told,' so the complaint begins, 'that we have been sent to France to pay for munitions sold to Russia.' It was not until prolonged artillery fire had been employed against these troops that they were reduced to submission and disbanded.

The spirit of the French nation was not unequal to this perilous trial. On May 15, Nivelle refusing to resign was dismissed, and Pétain became Commander-in-Chief. Loyal troops surrounded those who had fallen from their duty. Old Territorials, the fathers of families, pleaded with the infuriated linesmen. The disorders were pacified or suppressed. Over all a veil of secrecy was thrown so impenetrable that though scores of thousands of Frenchmen were concerned, no whisper ever reached the enemy, and whatever information was imparted to Sir Douglas Haig long remained buried in the bosom of his immediate staff. Pétain was of all others fitted to the healing task. In a period of several months he visited a hundred divisions of the Army, addressed the officers and men, heard grievances and complaints, mitigated the severities of the service,

Pétain's
Achieve-
ment.

increased the leave of the soldiers, and diminished by every skilful shift the fighting on the French front. He thus restored by the end of the year the morale and discipline of that sorely tried, glorious Army upon whose sacrifices the liberties of Europe had through three fearful campaigns mainly depended.

APPENDIX

I. BRITISH, FRENCH AND GERMAN OFFICIAL CASUALTY RETURNS.

APPENDIX I

BRITISH, FRENCH AND GERMAN OFFICIAL CASUALTY RETURNS

TOTAL BRITISH CASUALTIES ON THE WESTERN FRONT MONTH BY MONTH.

Taken from 'The Military Effort,' page 253 et seq.

1914.	August .	14,409		November .	46,238
	September	15,189		December .	13,803
	October .	30,192	1917.	January .	15,289
	November .	24,785		February .	26,140
	December .	11,079		March . .	25,788
1915.	January .	6,542		April . .	120,070
	February .	9,195		May . .	76,040
	March . .	24,483		June . .	75,123
	April . .	31,264		July . .	84,695
	May . .	65,730		August .	81,080
	June . .	22,563		September	81,249
	July . .	16,315		October .	119,808
	August .	14,587		November .	73,888
	September	59,615		December .	38,620
	October .	25,909	1918.	January .	13,042
	November .	9,263		February .	9,809
	December .	11,117		March . .	173,721
1916.	January .	10,975		April . .	143,168
	February .	13,014		May . .	69,049
	March . .	18,949		June . .	32,436
	April . .	22,409		July . .	32,562
	May . .	24,661		August .	122,272
	June . .	39,959		September	114,831
	July . .	196,081		October .	121,046
	August .	75,249		November .	20,925
	September	115,056			
	October .	66,852		Total	<u>2,706,154</u>

PERTES DES ARMEES FRANÇAISES (NORD-EST ET ORIENT) REPARTIES PAR PERIODES

Journal Officiel, Documents parlementaires, Session Extraordinaire 1920, Annexe 633, Séance du 29 Mars, 1920, proposition de résolution Marin.

(Ces chiffres ne comprennent pas les officiers.)

Dates.	Designation.	Morts sur le Terrain disparus et prisonniers.	Mort dans le formations sanitaires et hôpitaux de la zone des armées.	Morts dans les hôpitaux de la zone l'intérieur.	Evacués sur l'intérieur.
Août-Septembre, 1914	Bataille des frontières (Août 6-Septembre 5) et Bataille de la Marne (Septembre 6-13)	313,000	7,000	9,000	400,000
Octobre-Novembre, 1914	La course à la mer, 1 Bataille d'Artois, l'Yser	104,000	11,000	10,000	180,000
Décembre, 1914-Jan., 1915	Stabilisation	62,000	5,000	7,000	171,000
Février-Mars, 1915	1 Offensive de 1915 (1 Bataille de Champagne)	55,000	7,000	9,000	306,000
Avril-Mai-juin, 1915	2 Bataille d'Artois	121,000	13,000	3,000	145,000
Juillet-Août, 1915	Stabilisation	39,000	6,000	9,000	279,000
Sept.-Novembre, 1915	2 Offensive 1915 (2 Bataille Champagne, 2 Bataille d'Artois)	115,000	10,000	2,000	56,000
Décembre, 1915-Jan., 1916	Stabilisation	15,000	5,000	8,000	263,000
Février-Juin, 1916	Bataille défensive de Verdun	156,000	15,000	6,000	205,000
Juillet-Oct., 1916	Bataille de la Somme	114,000	16,000	3,000	55,000
Novembre-Décembre, 1916	1 Bataille offensive de Verdun	30,000	5,000	6,000	78,000
Janvier-Mars, 1917	Repli Allemand	20,000	4,000	8,000	169,000
Avril-Juillet, 1917	Offensive de l'Aisne (Chemin des Dames et Bataille des Monts)	87,000	15,000	7,000	128,000
Août-Décembre, 1917	Opérations à objectifs limités (Flandres, rive droite de la Meuse, la Malmaison)	38,000	9,000	3,000	41,000
Janvier-Février, 1918	Stabilisation	4,000	3,000	9,000	266,000
Mars-Juin, 1918	Campagne défensive de 1918	145,000	13,000	18,000	368,000
Juillet-Novembre, 1918	Campagne offensive de 1918	110,000	35,000	121,000	3,110,000
		1,528,000 ¹	179,000	Total, 4,938,000 ²	

¹ Dont: 477,800 prisonniers vivants en pays ennemi ou en Suisse, au Novembre 11, 1918, et 30,000 prisonniers rapatriés ou évadés depuis Juillet, 1916.

² Add Officers killed 36,000.

LOSSES ON THE WESTERN FRONT BY MAIN OPERATION PERIODS

(From the Statistics of the *Reichsarchiv*.)

THE GERMAN LOSSES OPPOSITE THE FRANCO-BELGIAN AND BRITISH FRONTS.

Period.	Opposite the Franco-Belgian Front.			Opposite the British Front. ¹			Opposite the Combined Franco-Belgian-British Fronts. ²		
	Dead. ³	Missing and Prisoner. ⁴	Wounded.	Dead. ³	Missing and Prisoner. ⁴	Wounded.	Dead. ³	Missing and Prisoner. ⁴	Wounded.
August–November, 1914	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	116,750 ⁵	107,640 ⁵	453,050 ⁵
December, 1914–January, 1915	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	— ⁵	54,825 ⁵	11,100 ⁵	104,100 ⁵
February–March, 1915	20,446	9,457	66,079	2,927	4,394	11,169	23,373	13,851	77,248
April–June, 1915	37,020	23,283	130,117	8,233	4,937	29,916	45,253	28,220	160,033
July–August, 1915	13,427	4,805	48,553	2,225	708	8,684	15,652	5,513	57,237
September–November, 1915	24,551	31,164	98,424	6,165	5,363	20,521	30,716	36,527	118,945
December, 1915–January, 1916	5,623	2,312	20,998	2,279	82	8,408	7,902	2,394	29,406
February–June, 1916	46,973	25,316	206,450	10,845	2,531	42,131	57,818	27,847	248,581
July–October, 1916	49,510	72,935	215,566	32,338	36,288	131,332	81,848	109,223	346,898
November–December, 1916	8,455	14,395	33,187	6,135	7,207	22,894	14,590	21,602	56,081
January–March, 1917	5,826	1,241	23,116	6,878	5,226	23,094	12,704	6,467	46,210
April–July, 1917	38,122	48,285	151,903	29,642	40,806	105,323	67,764	89,091	257,226
August–December, 1917	25,728	33,548	108,105	37,630	51,848	147,658	63,358	85,396	255,763
January–February, 1918	2,049	1,441	8,740	2,351	545	8,938	4,400	1,986	17,678
March–June, 1918	41,121	26,424	185,659	73,130	47,049	314,958	114,251	73,473	500,617
July–November, 1918 ⁶	45,169	154,313	215,135	33,027	193,554	144,535	78,196	347,867	359,670
							789,400 ⁷	968,197	3,088,743

¹ Including the German losses opposite the Portuguese troops, for a time interpolated in the British line.

² The losses opposite the American front are estimated at about 25,000; there are no data available on which to base an exact figure.*

³ 'Dead' here only means fallen on the field of battle, and does not include those who died in hospital, etc., from wounds or sickness.

⁴ Taken from the figures reported every ten days to the Supreme Command by the troops. The totals of missing include both men only temporarily absent from their units, and those first reported dead or wounded later.

⁵ For the losses from August, 1914, to January, 1915 (inclusive), only general totals are available, which are partly based on estimates.

⁶ The figures for October, 1918, are not quite complete; and those for November, 1918, are entirely lacking.

⁷ The total of German War Deaths on the Western Front in Table A, viz. 1,493,000, is obtained from these tables as follows. Killed 789,000 (*Reichsarchiv*) + died in hospital 300,000 (i.e., the same proportion as the French) + missing now believed dead in *Reichsarchiv* return 194,000 + $\frac{1}{2}$ this additional dead in *Nachweiseamt's* final return 170,000 + Estimate of Germans killed by Americans 40,000 = 1,493,000.

* This figure is now stated by the German *Reichsarchiv* to be incorrect. An unofficial German estimate places the total between 100,000 and 140,000. I have adopted the higher total.—W. S. C.

LOSSES OF MEN IN THE GERMAN LAND FORCES

(From Information supplied by the Central Enquiry Office (Zentral Nachweiseamt) for War Casualties and War Graves.)

On the Authority of the Official Casualty List.	Dead (Killed in Action and Died of Wounds or Sickness).			Number of Woundings ¹ so far as they were not mortal (not number of wounded men).			Prisoner and Missing, not including those known to have died in captivity (included in col. 2). ³		
	Officers.		Other Ranks.	Total.		Total.	Officers.	Other Ranks.	Total.
	Officers.	Other Ranks.		Officers.	Other Ranks.				
Up to 31.12.14 . . .	5,847	136,655		11,519	529,199	540,718	908	153,682	154,590
" 31.12.15 . . .	16,921	611,524		29,030	1,566,376	1,595,406	3,191	316,963	320,154
" 31.12.16 . . .	24,910	938,591		45,587	2,425,568	2,471,155	6,245	495,012	501,257
" 31.12.17 . . .	33,272	1,238,301		61,093	3,117,743	3,178,836	9,659	656,745	666,404
" 31.12.18 . . .	46,946	1,574,088		88,888	4,014,931	4,103,819	14,698	846,692	861,390
" 31.12.19 . . .	50,555	1,668,053		92,310	4,123,285	4,215,595	18,607	1,061,648	1,080,255
" 31.12.20 . . .	52,024	1,711,955		92,358	4,122,221	4,214,579 ²	18,143	1,047,089	1,065,232
" 30. 9.21 . . .	52,673	1,740,160		92,384	4,122,435	4,214,819	17,985	1,031,436	1,049,421
" 31.10.22 . . .	53,229	1,768,693		92,441	4,123,057	4,215,498	18,103	1,019,809	1,037,912
" 30. 6.23 . . .	53,386	1,781,138		92,458	4,123,315	4,215,773	18,042	1,012,032	1,030,074 ⁴

¹ The number of individuals wounded and the number of wound cases cannot be given separately.

² The number of wound cases is smaller than before because the number of individuals who were reported as died of wounds was greater than the fresh cases of wounds in the period.

³ The total of those who died in captivity has not been finally settled. Up to the present, 55,066 deaths of German prisoners have been reported by the States with which we were at war. Of these 40,300 are included in the casualty lists, the rest are still left in the total of Prisoner and Missing.

⁴ It must be assumed that the greater number of the German nationals still missing (170,000) are dead. The total of dead will therefore be increased to approximately 2,000,000.



MAR. 70

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